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Summary

Topic: Research Articles

Book reviews

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Absence and loneliness. On a painting by Van Gogh

Abstract: I have in mind, to begin with, a well-known painting by Van Gogh, *Vincent's Chair*. Some of the simple things you see there (for example, a chair, a pipe, a door, a bed or a crate) seem utterly ordinary and somewhat randomly placed. Except that, if we linger over them, they become unexpectedly strange. They ultimately reveal absence as such and a certain loneliness that descends over the place. The "image" in this painting has been interpreted in many ways. They have taken into account, for example, its new style and how it re-signifies elements of the real world, the painter's correspondence with his brother Theo, but also what he himself said about the painting ("my empty chair"), or his friendship with Paul Gauguin. Psychoanalysis was not slow to intervene. Phenomenological description or existential analysis were even more relevant. But I do not believe that there are or should be "interpretive keys" and "messages". In this case, a certain understanding of the work does not presuppose any such thing. Moreover, I find more suggestive precisely those interpretations that open up, discreetly, to the extraordinary world that such a painting reveals, its free play full of contrasts.

Keywords: *Vincent's Chair*, the strangeness of banal things, absence and solitude, possible interpretations.

We are familiar with a painting signed by Van Gogh, *Vincent's Chair*, dated December 1888[1]. The chair we see on this canvas is unexpectedly ordinary and placed in a normal place. Its reality and that of the space in which it is placed appear commonplace, even banal. All the elements that make up this poor and dreary reality are from the simple world of an ordinary room. Nothing special, just a few objects in a common and austere space.

„It is just that, as soon as you let such things catch your eye, something does not leave you in peace. First of all, the very image of that chair on which no one is sitting, and which seems to be sitting there for no one. You can see that it is a complete alien to the place, placed almost at random, because it reminds you of no one and refers to nothing else. The fact that the painting is titled in a certain way does not help you in this

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respect, it may only express a sad irony of the painter. Not only the chair in the picture lacks a place of its own, but also the other things, the pipe, a door, a bed or a crate, in so far as they are what you see. They appear cut off from one another, each isolated in its own way, with no obvious and natural spatial relations, no sensible time to hold them together. It is precisely this unnatural situation, subject rather to dislocation or to contingency itself, that makes their image so unusual, so strange.

So, a few simple, utterly ordinary, and somewhat randomly placed things that become unexpectedly strange.

Seen in its simple composition, the chair in the picture says almost nothing. Although recognizable as such at first glance, it tends to be a mere abstraction: with no particular place and time, no reference to other things or to any possible addressee. It can still be called a chair and nothing else only in conventionally sense. It withdraws from the eye almost everything you wish to see or recognize as its own. If, however, it leaves anything out, it would be an absence. I would venture to say: absence as such. But it is not marked in any particular way, it is not brought forward with any care, in one detail or another, in fact nothing speaks directly of such a thing. The absence of what? Possibly the absence of whom? Difficult to say, except that it, absence itself, seems to be at stake where a few simple things show themselves and at the same time evade their ordinary condition.

It is not only this absence that unsettles the gaze, but also a certain loneliness that dominates the place. "Vincent's chair", empty and without a specific place, without any sign that it belonged to someone or that it was waiting for someone, is revealed to a gaze that suddenly feels the aloneness of that thing. And also, of the improper place in which it appears. We do not usually speak of the loneliness of things, but of the loneliness that people experience at certain moments, and it seems to be precisely to them that such loneliness seems to be peculiar. Only this time, a certain loneliness hangs over the very things that appear in the image. One might wonder whether it is loneliness or solitude. As we know, Gadamer made a careful distinction between the two: "Loneliness is a loss; what we lose is the nearness to others" (Gadamer 1988, 104)[2]. And loss is experienced as suffering, as when one is deserted by one's friends or forgotten by one's loved ones. What he loses in such a situation is the closeness of others. Thus, loneliness refers to a negative fact: being abandoned or forgotten by others. In contrast to loneliness, solitude can be sought. In modern literature, the search for solitude is a well-established theme, for example in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*. And the one who seeks solitude appears as a stranger to others. "Loneliness is an experience of loss and solitude is an experience of renunciation. Loneliness is suffered – in solitude something is being sought for" (Gadamer 1988, 104). This distinction is worth-knowing, especially nowadays.

I don't know whether, in the case of Van Gogh's painting, such a distinction is as straightforward. There could be something perfectly ambiguous at stake, both loneliness and solitude, hidden suffering and a search for something outside ordinary life. But the world that chair describes offers no sign of it. It does not speak of the absence of a place of its own, of a 'home', perhaps not even for the gaze of the one who, here, sees himself directly. The lonely eye no longer seems to find a place to aim for, nor a time for itself. What, then, is the source of the loneliness that dominates the things seen and the air between them? It has not its provenance in the fact that the chair is alone there, empty and isolated, as well as other things around it. A solitary thing, even when you expect to meet more than one, does not create by itself the feeling of loneliness. Such a feeling should rather be related to the way certain things are seen or felt. In Van Gogh's painting, they appear without any obvious relation to each other, as if any of them might be missing or might appear elsewhere. A kind of total contingency leaves things so alien to each other that you immediately sense their strangeness. In fact, it is not that things as such are like that, but it is precisely a particular way of seeing them that makes them appear to us in this way, they become precisely as they are seen. And they are seen, at least sometimes, analogously to the way in which one sees oneself or the way in which one feels around them. I would not rule out that they can also be seen reactively, in the sense of a disanalogy, to distance oneself from self-perception. It is just that even in such cases the above relation can be sensed. Which means that the painting can appear in the way of a testimony - deeply ambiguous, however - of how one perceives oneself at a given moment.

The 'image' in this Van Gogh painting has been interpreted in many ways. For example, the new style in which he paints, and more specifically the new spatial vision he brings (Hulsker 1996), (Hardy 1997). The way he re-signifies or transfigures elements of the real world, its objects and processes. The correspondence with his brother Theo (in particular the letters of November 23, 1888, January 17, 1889, February 10-11, 1890) and what he himself says about this painting ("my empty chair", as he says in the letter of January 17, 1889). Or his special friendship with Paul Gauguin, whom he missed in an absolutely dramatic way. Could it be Gauguin to whom he sends the absence that that empty, solitary chair makes him feel? We don't know if it was prepared for him. Incidentally, another painting by Van Gogh is entitled *Paul Gauguin's Chair*, painted in the same period as *Vincent's Chair*, December 1888. Both bring forward the absence of the named, but the latter offers a strange self-perception: to see oneself absent, to regard one's own absence with apparent serenity or even irony. Psychoanalysis has therefore not been slow to intervene in this matter (Lubin 1996)[3]. But neither has phenomenological or existential description,

even more relevant in the case of the experience that this painting makes possible[4]. It is understandable as long as the painting hints, through the very ambiguity of what is depicted, at a way of situating oneself in the world or, at very limit, a way of being.

For instance, Heidegger, without referring to this painting, invokes the name of the painter early on. In his 1923 writing entitled *Ontology - The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, specifically where he speaks of the „every-one" i.e. "*the* no-one which circulates in factical Dasein and haunts it like a spectre" (Heidegger 1999, 26), he will recall Van Gogh as an example of "the search for his own Dasein". He immediately tells us that, at the critical period of this quest, Van Gogh writes to his brother: "I would rather die a natural death than be prepared for it at the university". Consequently, the painter continued to work as if "he drew the pictures in his paintings from the depths of his heart and soul, and went mad in the course of this intense confrontation with his own Dasein" (Heidegger 1999, 26-27).The conclusion in the last words is not easy to support, but I would retain the thought that precedes it, that the painter worked as if "he drew the pictures in his paintings from the depths of his heart and soul"[5]. One immediately thinks of the genesis of a singular way of looking and, at the same time, of the unpredictable way in which appearances on the canvas and, with them, a world of their own emerges.

In *Ordeal by Labyrinth* (specifically in the section named "Animus et anima"), Eliade mentions in passing the painting invoked above and returns to an idea that follows him almost all his life. It is the idea of the camouflage of meaning in the insignificant, a phenomenon that he considers truly relevant to this history. At one point he refers directly to his own prose, in which he tries to recognize the miraculous element in the very mundane matter of the everyday world. For example, in *The Forbidden Forest*, a novel in which "a certain symbolic meaning of the human condition" is glimpsed in the very space of the meaningless. He believes that, after all, what transgresses historical life is camouflaged precisely in the flux of this life, just as the extraordinary sometimes hides in the ordinary. "Aldous Huxley wrote of the vision conferred by LSD as a *visio beatifica*: it enabled him to see forms and colors as Van Gogh saw his famous chair. It is beyond doubt that this gray reality, this everyday life of ours, is a camouflage for something else" (Eliade 1982, 177-178).[6] So something seen speaks rather of something else. And something unseen shows itself partly through what is seen. It lets itself be seen at the same time as it withdraws (if we accept this figurative way of speaking). I would note as eloquent this paradox of the camouflage of the significant, the double hermeneutic operation that it provides. By cultivating such a paradox, Eliade goes beyond the classical scheme of binary options: seen/unseen, revealed/concealed. Such an option is visible whenever a simple opposition

is at stake. We know, for example, that André Breton, in *Crisis of the Object*, believes that the real, in the literal sense, is not something given before our eyes, but rather something hidden by the very presence of the given. But, thinking in this way, the second term is just as vulnerable as the first, simply by opposition to it. Eliade leaves behind such an opposition. What is announced by what is seen is neither something simply hidden, nor something that can be deciphered as such. A narrative, for example, gives us the possibility of encountering something strange even in the ordinary world. This is not peculiar only to a particular kind of writing, such as the fantastic narrative, nor to a particular form of creation. It concerns, Eliade says, every mode of life and every form of creation, from the minor to the truly elevated. One of his confessions is formidable in this sense. "In all of my stories the narrative progresses on several levels, in order to achieve a gradual revelation of the "fantastic" that is concealed beneath everyday banality. Just as a new scientific axiom reveals a hitherto unknown structure of reality—in other words, provides the foundation of a new world—so fantastic literature reveals, or rather creates, parallel universes. It is not a matter of escapism, as certain critics think, because creation—at every level and in every sense of the word—is the specific characteristic of the human condition." (Eliade 1982, 178)

I have mentioned these interpretations, only some of the well-known ones, not because any one of them provides a key to understanding Van Gogh's painting. After all, I do not believe that such keys exist or that they should be sought. Slightly more suggestive to me are those interpretations which first of all recognize the distinctive world to which a particular work opens, and which thus allow us to glimpse something of its free play, such as some unexpected levels of signification or the contrasting dynamics it reveals. Possibly, a certain sense of life (Afloroaei 2021, 96-107). These interpretations usually claim less about the work as such. They do not speak with the pretense of telling us what it means and what it says, what message it would convey and in what way it does so, in what place of art or culture, under what style or with what hidden human motivations. On the contrary, they seem to place themselves, quite honestly and with a sense of their own limits, close to that world which the work itself is capable of opening up.

One suggestion of what some interpreters have said concerns the deeply ambiguous structure of our ordinary world. And, of course, of our everyday life. The latter, though mostly mundane, prosaic, is occasionally touched by something unusual. Although grey as we usually see it, it is sometimes disturbed by the emergence of something worthy of attention. Its insignificant world, as it most often appears to us, gives way to surprising signs or data. In other words, possible "meanings". But the latter term has led to much misunderstanding. This has happened because, more often than not, its substantive rather than its verbal meaning is taken to refer to

certain and taken-for-granted messages, rather than to the varied experiences of the human senses and mind. In a certain and taken-for-granted message you find rather the end of understanding. Or an appearance of it, a mere abstraction. In order to rediscover the human desire for understanding, which involves both the senses and the mind, you have to see it where it is truly alive, as it confronts itself and others, sometimes antinomical in itself.

That is why I would not risk saying that Van Gogh's painting, invoked above, has such and such a meaning. Or that it conveys such a message. On the contrary, I think it suggests that we should leave behind such reflexes of thought or trivial ways of looking at things. Nor would I say that it is simply incomprehensible. The usual way of judging such paintings, whether on the basis of some meaning or of something cryptic, mysterious, easily reveals its superficiality. The same applies to those interpretations which tell us that, after all, any perspective, any attitude of the beholder, including the one who sees nothing.

What would I finally add though? If you look at the painting as if you do not want to say anything about it, simply and as far as possible at some distance from certain interpretations, you cannot help feeling the eerie air in the image of that banal space. Likewise, the very absence itself seems to mark each thing that is seen. Although it is not seen as such, it seems to show itself in the last instance. And, with it, the unusual loneliness of the place. It is possible that this is coming from someone's gaze. After all, the empty chair in this painting ("my empty chair", as the painter says in a letter) shows what is not visible in itself. It brings into presence - if we again accept a paradox - absence itself. Perhaps that is why the ordinary things that can be seen suddenly appear totally unusual. Although familiar and simple, of an absolutely elementary banality, they easily let you feel something utterly strange.

Notes

[1] I mention that this text reuses, in part and in a revised form, a fragment from Ştefan Afloroaei, *Existential fable*, section V, "What is not seen". (Afloroaei 2018, 115-121)

[2] I discussed this matter in an article named "Loneliness, here present and yet out of date" published in Cătălin Cioabă and Bogdan Mincă (eds.), *Liber amicorum. Studii şi eseuri în onoarea lui Gabriel Liiceanu*, ZETAbooks, Bucureşti, 2012, pp. 119-134.

[3] *Cf.* Albert Lubin, *Stranger on the Earth. A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh*, 1996; The title of this book is inspired by a verse from Psalms 119:19 ("I am a stranger on Earth...").

[4] In his a late "Self-Presentation" (*Selbstdarstellung*), Gadamer makes an important point in this respect. "We were attracted by van Gogh's *Letters*, by Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* which he opposed to Hegel, and behind all the daring and daring of our existential commitment was - a still hardly glimpsed threat to the romantic traditionalism of our educated culture - the

huge figure of Friedrich Nietzsche, with his ecstatic critique of all [these thinkers] and of the illusions of self-consciousness." (Gadamer 1993, 482)

[5] In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger would come back to an image present in several of Van Gogh's paintings, that of old peasant shoes, to speak of the distinct world of the work of art. (Heidegger 1992, 158-161)

[6] In a footnote in the Romanian translation - *Încercarea labirintului* (*Convorbiri cu Claude Henri Rocquet*) -, Doina Cornea makes a comment worthy of attention, namely that, in that painting by Van Gogh "the empty chair suggests, rather, a lonely and meditative presence" (n. 173).

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Exploring the Paradox of Beauty: Aesthetics and Metaphysics in the Work of Ștefan Afloroaei

Abstract: This article aims to contribute to the intercultural dialogue by discussing and sharing some recent developments in aesthetics in the (untranslated) work of the Romanian philosopher Ștefan Afloroaei (b. 1952). From the impressive thematic corpus of his writings, I will discuss here the exploration of the sense and metaphysical meaning of beauty, which is congruent with the metaphysical questions about the "meaning and sense of life" (Afloroaei 2021). I will show how, by exploring the "paradox of beauty" (Afloroaei 2008; Afloroaei 2008b; Afloroaei 2018; Afloroaei 2018b), such as the often mysterious or strange beauty present both in the familiar world of everyday life and in art, Afloroaei successfully gives fresh answers to longstanding questions in aesthetics, as well as another, more charming face to metaphysics. The focus here is on questions regarding *beauty* and *truth in painting* (Heidegger 1971, Derrida 1987), which are explored starting from a painting by Vincent van Gogh, *Vincent's Chair* (1888).

Keywords: beauty, everyday life, painting, paradox, Vincent van Gogh.

1. Introduction

This article[1] discusses the untranslated[2] work of the Romanian philosopher Ștefan Afloroaei on the topic of beauty, which brings together successfully the fields of metaphysics and aesthetics. By re-reading some of the key interpretations of beauty, Afloroaei offers valuable insights on how beauty may open up and let us see "a completely different world" and, this way, he also manages to give another, more charming face to metaphysics. Because his philosophy still has a rare virtue, that of transforming the act of its reading into a living and transformative experience, ready to inspire and give wings to the reader's thinking or imagination. The stakes of Afloroaei's explorations lie, of course, beyond the field of aesthetics. All these inquiries are part of his long and broad effort to rehabilitate the genuine "speculative thought" and to assert and defend the "inevitable presence of the metaphysical" even nowadays or, in other words, the metaphysics in its natural exercise and from the world of everyday life.

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The path he followed in doing this is similar to that opened by the artistic images that lead our gaze where it cannot reach on its own: he chose to show us and *make visible* – with the help of beauty – what we would not otherwise be able to see. In other words, to open our eyes to what beauty finally allows us to see. The aim of this article is to render the philosopher's enduring endeavour to unveil what *beauty* allows us to see – be it the beauty of "our everyday world" (Afloroaei 2008) or that of the "ethereal world of the word" as an expression of the poetic act, or the beauty of the world of "what is not seen" without the sensible mediation of the pictorial image (Afloroaei 2018).

The metaphysical reinterpretation of beauty proposed by Afloroaei is a task he constantly handled since the essay „Frumusețea ca atare - contingentă și totuși atemporală" ("Beauty as such - contingent and yet timeless") (Afloroaei 2008b), passing through the ASPLF Congress in Iași dedicated to the *Beautiful* in 2016 (Afloroaei 2018b), up to the most recent book (Afloroaei 2021). This reinterpretation is set up in a fertile dialogue with authors belonging to longstanding and diverse philosophical traditions. It starts with Plato and passes through medieval thought and the paradoxes of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, up to contemporary authors such as Borges, Danto, Deleuze, Eco, Eliade, Ferry, Gadamer, and Heidegger. The topic of *paradox* is central in his writings, such as *Metafizica noastră de toate zilele* (Our Everyday Metaphysics), 2008, *Privind altfel lumea celor absurde* (Viewing Differently the World of the Absurd), 2013, *Fabula existențială* (The Existential Fable), 2018, and *Despre simțul vieții* (On the Sense of Life), 2021. The paradox is also the key to re-reading the mysterious capacity of beauty to open up and letting us see "a completely different world", within the very content of the everyday world. The access to understanding beauty is offered precisely by the exploration of its inevitable and defining *paradox*: beauty is "immediately perceptible and yet intangible as such", "sensible and yet timeless" or, at the ultimate limit of the paradox, "both pure and sensible, simple and contingent" or "something singular, thrilling in the usual air of states of affairs", "the strangeness of something which is, in the first instance, familiar." (Afloroaei 2008, 232–243; Afloroaei 2018, 127–128, 131)

2. The Paradox of Beauty

The main stake of this exploration is to understand the living tension that inhabits beauty, the *pathos* and the paradoxical nature of both beauty and its experiencing, already glimpsed by Plato in the dialogues *Hippias Major* and *Symposium*. To distinguish them, Afloroaei ingeniously uses the double meaning of the term "sense": both a sensory faculty or

feeling and meaning. Thus, unlike the usual sharp contrast between the classical/metaphysical attitude about beauty and the modern or current relational attitudes, such as the one exposed by Luc Ferry in *Le sens du beau* (1990), for Afloroaei the metaphysical *meaning* of beauty – in itself, pure, absolute –, did not exclude the human *sense* of beauty, understood as "a sensible experience, a way of perception and understanding". On the contrary, beauty always affords and meet with such a sense of contemplation, which is "itself paradoxical, both sensibility and simple vision of the pure." (Afloroaei 2018, 137–138, 143–145) Starting from here, Afloroaei advances a refined and subtle interpretation of the dialogue between Socrates and Hippias, which gives the latter a belated part of justice, because Hippias' question ("who" versus "what is beautiful?") and the subsequent answers are not considered naive and frivolous. On the contrary, he "refers to something extremely concrete and alive, naming a thing that can become truly beautiful", thus letting us understand that the idea of "simple and pure" beauty "does not come with the claim of self-sufficiency, it does not mean something separate and withdrawn entirely into itself." Moreover, capitalizing on the relevance of the motif of Eros as a mediator in *Symposium*, Afloroaei further illuminates the presenting of sensitive beauty as something of the nature of inter-mediation: it announces and names "that which attracts to be loved" and thus opens up the way to that something "pure" or "timeless". Even in the Platonic dialogues, sensible beauty is not radically separated from unconditional beauty, timeless, intelligible, but intangible without the first mediation of its sensible face, through which it is shown "as such" in a lived, concrete experience." (Afloroaei 2008, 235–236, 241; Afloroaei 2018, 133–135)

Hence, in Afloroaei'view, it is not a question of establishing a rigid opposition like that one between the metaphysics of the unconditional and relativism or perspectivism or a steep chasm between two faces of beauty, outlined either by a single "eternal meaning" or by the contingency of everyday life, which would state a constitutive "dualism" of beauty. He rejects both the old schematic oppositions of "abstractions empty of meaning" and the dualism that constituted a good part of the legacy of 'school' metaphysics, as well as the dominant way today of naming or delimiting almost everything in a relational manner. For Afloroaei, beauty "as such" holds precisely that wonderful paradox as "sensible ideality", which has been explored by him in a fruitful dialogue with the metaphysical tradition. His reading, however, shows a significant difference from metaphysical tradition. Beauty and its experience presuppose the antinomian correlation between the sensible – "beauty as a physical sensation" felt immediately (scrutinized by Borges), which is offered by itself – and the pure, intangible: "to find beauty 'in itself' means to encounter it sensibly and yet in the way of something unconditional,

completely free". (Afloroaei 2008, 98, 232–239; Afloroaei 2018, 146–149, 151–152)

Through this paradoxical characteristic, beauty appears as an image of the humankind itself, notably of the constitutive paradox that defines the human mode of existence: to be both conditioned and truly free (as Kierkegaard stated). In this way, beauty expresses "that living tension hidden in [human's] very being. The terms that seem to definitively exclude each other […] recreate in fact a perfectly antinomic conjunction. What comes into being in this way, in a pure, yet sensitive form, really manifests a very unusual tension." (Afloroaei 2008, 358) These characteristics also do not allow for explanations by simple answers to questions like "why?" or "for what?", since beauty "accomplishes itself without any relation of purpose, without any utility," just like life from which it is not at all separate and which is desired in itself, for itself. Hence the pure and elevated gratuity of beauty and desire for beauty. It is precisely this particular gratuitousness that allows beauty to open beyond itself and offer "an opening to what is ordinarily inaccessible." (Afloroaei 2018, 139–143)

In this context, it is worth recalling a precious lesson offered by Afloroaei, which joins that offered by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1987): the idea of encountering *immediately* beauty itself is not just an "old metaphysical story" or a "mere narrative" even in today's world of everyday life. Although the presence of beauty itself is ineffable, it can still be perceived "in the way of a simple and pure fact, absolutely natural." Beauty, as Afloroaei shows, does not appear abstractly, but "fundamentally depends on an extremely concrete experience that one makes, something like a living and personal test. Its existential incidence is never purely subjective or arbitrary. On the contrary, it presupposes an elevated sensitivity, a time of initiation and an effort that is not without uncertainty and doubts." (Afloroaei 2008, 237–241) This re-reading of beauty has the merit of *situating* beauty – along with metaphysics – in our everyday concerns or "life problems", those experiences that compel us to facing our own life or put it to the test, such as "the problem of loneliness, the way of perceiving time and the imminence of death, the joy of few moments" – and finally, the question of the meaning of life (Afloroaei 2013, 13–115; Afloroaei 2021, 73–78).

3. Beauty in art: "What is not seen"

Just as the proper description of beauty can only be accomplished by antinomian expressions, so its meanings belong not only to "the spectacle of metaphysics," but are to be found in everyday life as well as in the art concerned with it, which lets us glimpse its paradoxical structure. The

Chapter V in *Fabula existențială* (*The Existential Fable*) entitled „Ceea ce nu se vede" ("What is not seen"), dedicated to Vincent van Gogh's painting *Vincent's Chair* (1888), offers a relevant example of a refined interpretation of painting in the horizon of the question "how can the ineffable be expressed?" and of the natural imminence of paradox in our daily lives.

Vincent van Gogh, *Vincent's chair* (1888), National Gallery, London

A simple description of the painting *Vincent's chair* can retain the image of an equally simple, even dull, greyish reality: an ordinary room with a few banal things – a chair, a pipe, a door, a chest. But a closer look, like that of Afloroaei, also notices the loneliness of the artist's gaze, which attracts the viewer to participate in the solitary and empty gaze with which those few simple, ordinary things are seen, and due to which they suddenly become strangers to that place and uncanny. The subtle, multi-layered and open interpretation of what Van Gogh's painting – with its strange image that disquiets the gaze – makes possible beyond his style, is another lesson offered by Afloroaei.

3.1.   Absence and loneliness

First, in the section "Absenţă şi însingurare" ("Absence and Loneliness"), he helps us to see that *Vincent's Chair* is "to some extent, the very testimony of this way in which one sees oneself. The empty chair in this painting lets us see what, in fact, is not visible: the absence as such and the loneliness of the gaze. It brings into presence – if we accept a *paradox* – the absence itself". Loneliness, here indistinct from solitude, shows the absence as such, the lack of a proper place, of a "home", outside of familiar life. In other words, in the metaphysical register, Van Gogh's painting "gives a glimpse of a way of being in the world, at the limit, a way of being". (Afloroaei 2018, 115–118)

3.2.   Camouflaging the real in the unreal

Then, in the section "Camuflarea realului în cele ireale" ("Camouflaging the real in the unreal"), Afloroaei touches on an essential topic in the history of painting – the desire to make the invisible visible. Because painters did not wait for the modern age to express the desire to "make visible", not to render the visible (Paul Klee); the purpose to "make the invisible visible" or to "express the inexpressible" (by other means) was already manifested with Apelles, then found in Leonardo da Vinci and Nicolas Poussin works and writings, among others. Van Gogh was concerned, in his own way, with how "something unseen shows itself in part through what is seen." Again, Afloroaei's interpretation of the painter's effort "to glimpse what, as such, cannot be seen" lies beyond rigid oppositions of the either/or type. Because the painting *Vincent's Chair* allows us to see the "deeply ambiguous structure of everyday life", as a mixture of prosaic and uncanny, familiar and strange, insignificant and significant. The paradoxical phenomenon of camouflaging the uncanny or strange in the ordinary or familiar, exemplified by this painting – or, more broadly, of camouflaging the fantastic, the wonderful,

the extraordinary in the everyday, the common, the ordinary –, is rightfully compared to the dialectic of the camouflage of the sacred in the profane, explored by Mircea Eliade (1963). Yet, once again, Afloroaei's subtle interpretation goes "beyond the classical scheme of binary oppositions, such as seen/unseen, revealed/hidden", to highlight the double movement of meaning in the insignificant and of the absurd in meaning (Afloroaei 2018, 118–121).

3.3.   The Names of truth

Finally, the section "Nume ale adevărului" ("Names of truth") opens up a new way of understanding the idea of the plurality of modes of truth, inscribed in the contemporary tendency to rethink the truth as specific to each genre of expression, other than the "epistemological meanings of truth". Moreover, in Afloroaei's view, the very truth of the pictorial image is plural, because each interpretation "opens up a way in the comprehension of the work as such", as it offers itself to the gaze, and the gaze itself "allows to be led where it has no way of reaching on its own". With such a careful gaze, receptive to the call for the "truth of the painting", Afloroaei manages to discern it differently than other famous declinations of *truth in painting* (Heidegger 1971, and his opponent, Derrida 1987).

His interpretation shows that, in the case of *Vincent's Chair*, its truth can be recognized in its very paradox. Thus, its truth is: 1) a form of eloquence and suggestion, which "consists here in the very self-discovery of this absence", in the "lonely condition of the beholder's gaze," through which the ordinary becomes strange; 2) a mode of expressiveness, the one by which "the absence of expression becomes unnaturally expressive"; 3) a mode of presence, which consists in the total captivating of the gaze by simple paint brushes, lines and colours; and 4) a way to open the space of an unusual form of possibility: the "transfiguration of the ordinary", which "let us see another face of this world, another world eventually". In the particular case of this painting, which lets us see "the strangeness of something which is, in the first instance, familiar", its truth might reside precisely "in the fact that such strangeness is felt as such." (Afloroaei 2018, 121–128)

A final remark on the exploration of the paradox of beauty by Ştefan Afloroaei regards Chapter VII „Lumea eterată a cuvântului" ("The Ethereal World of the Word") in *The Existential Fable*, where he brings back to our attention, in a fresh way, the affinity of metaphysics with poetry in the exploration of what is ineffable, incomprehensible in itself, foreign to ordinary meaning. On the one hand, the poetic act shows us the

vulnerability of the act of understanding itself; but, on the other hand, it lets us glimpse that which, in itself, has no way of showing itself, and thus exceeds the common sphere of meaning. For the characteristic of poetic speech consists in the freedom from meaning, the freedom of expression without limits, which also opens up the appetite of metaphysics to look at the "absurd" not only or not so negatively as something illogical, aberrant, meaningless, but also as something mysterious, hidden, strange, incomprehensible in itself. The latter can ultimately be touched and expressed by poetic language in a "form of plenitude inexhaustible as such and incomprehensible in any other language" (as Gadamer 1987 already maintained). Another valuable lesson offered here by Afloroaei concerns the paradox of the poetic utterance which, placing us "beyond the logic of non-contradiction, in the very ambiguous temporality of concrete life", also expresses "an infinite tension in relationship with oneself", since in the poetic utterance both "the distance from common sense and ordinary speech" and the dependence on them and on our common world arise. Through its paradoxical capacity – as "absolute language" – to be "both inside and outside a world that becomes real thanks to words", the poetic utterance manages to "touch what seems intangible as such", and "the strangest things are thus discovered in the familiar space of our lives". (Afloroaei 2018, 155–164)

4. Conclusions

In this way, Afloroaei masterfully reaffirms a comprehensive, creative and edifying attitude in our encounters both with art and everyday life. For, in his interpretation, not only the art works paradoxicalize the ordinary and signify "transfigurations of the commonplace" (as Danto 1981 noted), but also the world of everyday life affords such transfigurations. This idea is also of great interest to the Aesthetics of Everyday Life, which explores both the everydayness of the everyday, as Yuriko Saito did in *Everyday Aesthetics* (2007), and the relationships between the familiar and the strange, the ordinary and the extraordinary in our everyday aesthetic life, as Thomas Leddy did in *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (2012), both authors being mentioned in *Fabula existenţială* (*The Existential Fable*) (Afloroaei 2018, 125–127, 145). As someone involved in the research area of everyday aesthetics, I would like to record as well Afloroaei's merit in offering a subtle and complex understanding of the interaction between the ordinary and the extraordinary. He conceives it not as a linear relationship between two opposite poles, between which somehow the distance would be gradually reduced through a discrete succession of categories (from pretty to beautiful and then to sublime or

miraculous), but as an antinomian conjunction or a dialectical interaction, similar to the camouflage or the fulgurating eruption of the sacred into profane explored by Eliade (1963).

Notes

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[2] The writings by Ștefan Afloroaei mentioned here are not translated in English. The English translations of the quotes belong to me.

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Illustration: Vincent Van Gogh, *Vincent's Chair* (1888), National Gallery, London.
https://www.vincentvangogh.org/images/paintings/van-goghs-chair.jpg

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Simulation, Virtual Reality, and Global Skepticism: Technological Metaphors and the Reformulation of Traditional Problems of Metaphysics

Abstract: The arguments in favor of a simulated world, as put forth by Descartes, Putnam, Bostrom, and Chalmers, were constructed to achieve different goals. Descartes rejected global skepticism, Putnam rejected metaphysical realism, Bostrom advanced the argument for the existence of mathematical and informational foundations of the world, and Chalmers proposed the perspective of simulation realism. When viewed through the lens of methodology, the arguments put forth by Descartes and Putnam proved fruitful. When considered from a metaphysical perspective, the arguments put forth by Bostrom and Chalmers did not resolve any existing metaphysical issues. The objective of this article is twofold: firstly, to illustrate the inconsistency of simulation realism; secondly, to propose that the simulation hypothesis and simulation realism are merely consequences of the pervasive adoption of new technologies, namely the Internet, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence. Due to the technological metaphors used, the hypothesis of simulation and the realism of simulation have the merit of making a series of classical philosophical problems accessible to educated people in the 21st century. Among these is the problem of the foundations of reality, the possibility of the existence of a creator, the possibility of knowledge, the problem of human nature, the nature of consciousness, and so on.

Keywords: pancomputationalism, mathematical universe hypothesis, evil genius hypothesis, brain-in-the-vat argument, simulation hypothesis, simulation realism, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, consciousness.

Introduction

The history of philosophy offers a series of metaphysical idealism approaches (as exemplified by the works of Plato, Berkeley, Hegel, and, more recently, Bernardo Kastrup) that consistently claim that the external or sensory-accessible world is a simulation derived from a more fundamental structure that is endowed with authentic reality. These authentic realities may be called Platonic Ideas, Ideas in the Mind of God, God's Perceptions, or the Universal Mind. These approaches all assume

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that fundamental reality is to be understood in informational rather than physical terms. The central role of mathematics in modern and contemporary science has led some contemporary thinkers to advocate the concept of mathematical foundations underlying the entire physical world, in line with the perspective of realism regarding mathematical structures. This line of thinking led to the *Mathematical Universe Hypothesis*, first formulated by Konrad Zuse (Zuse, 1970) and later developed by Max Tegmark. (Tegmark 2014, 243-271) This hypothesis states that all physical reality can be understood as a computable, mathematical structure. Ultimately, this hypothesis evolved into a *pancomputationalist* account, which posits that the essence of any physical system can be defined as a computation. (Anderson & Piccinini, 2018, 2024) However, the concept of a mathematical-informational foundation for the universe has become a dominant one with the advent of computer science, the development of computer and programming science, the growth of a rich digital ecosystem, and the emergence of AI-based applications. In practice, the physical world is today doubled by a digital, technologically realized world, a world in which experienced entities, even if they are only simulated entities, are attributed a reality as consistent as that of physical entities. This has given rise to two kinds of problems in the arena of philosophical investigation: on the one hand, the epistemological problem of the extent to which we can know anything certain, given that as epistemic subjects we would only have access to physical simulations of informational patterns; on the other hand, the metaphysical problem of the nature of the reality in which we live as human beings: does external reality have its consistency, or is it merely a simulation?

The aim of this investigation is not to examine metaphysical idealism or the realism of mathematical structures. Rather, it will assess the potential of some philosophical thought experiments, derived from the famous Cartesian evil genius hypothesis, to help clarify some epistemological and metaphysical problems. These experiments assume that physical reality can be, or has been, simulated by a (possibly omniscient) programmer. It is argued that such experiments can provide us with theoretical tools to either overthrow global skepticism, shake our confidence in the doctrine of metaphysical realism, or both. To this end, the brain-in-the-vat argument as formulated by Hilary Putnam, and the simulation argument as formulated by Nick Bostrom (and developed by David Chalmers) will be briefly evaluated. Philosophically, it can be argued that any argument that refutes global skepticism or weakens metaphysical realism represents a significant theoretical advance. Finally, it can be argued that, despite their impressive nature, the philosophical results of these thought experiments are relatively modest. The simulation hypothesis and simulation realism can be seen as consequences at the level of philosophical

conceptualization of the discovery and widespread adoption of new technologies such as the Internet, virtual worlds, and artificial intelligence. However, even if these new forms of conceptualization offer a new strategy for rejecting global skepticism and metaphysical realism, they do not offer any significant solutions to the problem of the nature or foundations of external reality.

1. Reality as a conceptual simulation.

The modern adventure of mind experiments that present the external world to us as a simulated world begins with the Cartesian evil genius hypothesis. Descartes does not suggest that such a demon exists, nor that the world is essentially a simulation, a trick of an evil genius; but the mere possibility of a demon capable of manipulating our perceptions of the external world and our own body would be enough to raise a serious question mark about the performances of an epistemic subject. Since we cannot determine for sure whether or not we are being deceived by an evil demon, we cannot rule out the possibility of the action of an evil demon. So, to know something with certainty, we must exclude the possibility of the existence and action of an evil demon. But as Descartes shows in the *Second Meditation*, the knowledge of one' s own existence escapes the skeptical conclusion, for if I am constantly deceived, there must be an "I" that is deceived. So, "this proposition: 'I am, I exist', whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in the mind, is necessarily true." (Descartes 2008, 18) Thus, even the postulation of an evil genius capable of completely disrupting the perception of the external world is not enough to make us doubt our existence; the truth of the proposition I exist is enough to understand that the Self and, ultimately, the external world are not diabolical simulations. In the end, Descartes solves the problem of skepticism: from the fact that I can clearly and distinctly conceive that I exist, it necessarily follows that we can know something with absolute certainty; therefore global skepticism is nonsense.

The hypothesis of the simulation of the external world, launched by Descartes' hypothesis of the evil genius, made a spectacular comeback in contemporary philosophy with the famous "brain in a vat" argument formulated by Hilary Putnam in his book *Reason, Truth, and History* (1981). This time, the American philosopher' s stakes were epistemological (the undermining of skepticism, but also the correspondence theory of truth), but also had to do with the theoretical undermining of metaphysical realism, the idea that the world and truth exist beyond what a human epistemic subject can conceive and think. The argument is presented as a science fiction experiment, an experiment that was later artistically exploited in the

film *The Matrix* (1999). Let's imagine that we are the victims of an evil scientist who has subjected us to a macabre experiment: our brains have been removed from our bodies, placed in a vat, and kept artificially alive. All the nerves that reach the brain are connected to a supercomputer that provides the nerve impulses needed to generate the experiences we have in everyday life. Everything that happens to us seems normal to us, but our whole experience would be nothing more than a consequence of electrical impulses. The diabolical scientist can make his victim experience any event by altering the computer program or issuing different commands. (Putnam 1981, 6) Putnam suggests that we can extend this experiment and imagine that each individual is nothing more than a brain in a vat. The question is whether a brain in a vat can know that it is just a brain in a vat. Of course, Hilary Putnam also wants to raise the issue of skepticism about the external world, but that is not his ultimate intention; his ultimate aim will be to deal a blow to traditional metaphysical realism and replace it with his version of realism, internal realism.

In brief, Putnam's solution to the problem raised by this argument is as follows: "In fact, I am going to argue that the supposition that we are actually brains in a vat, although it violates no physical law, and is perfectly consistent with everything we have experienced, cannot possibly be true. *It cannot possibly be true,* because it is, in a certain way, self-refuting." (Putnam 1981, 7) Why should the hypothesis formulated by this thought experiment be self-contradictory? Putnam's answer goes something like this: even if people who are just brains in a vat can think and 'say' everything we might think and say, they still cannot mean what we mean. In other words, these people cannot think or say that they are brains in a vat, even if they say something like 'we are brains in a vat'. (Putnam 1981, 8) Why can't I think that those people are brains in a vat? Because, says Putnam, they can't refer to anything external, so they can't think and say that they are brains in a vat. (Putnam 1981, 10) "Our talk of apples and fields is intimately connected with our nonverbal transactions with apples and fields. There are language 'entry rules' which take us from experiences of apples to such utterances as 'I see an apple' (…)." (Putnam 1981, 11) In other words, when a brain in a vat says the word "apple" or "tree", it is not really referring to apples and trees. "One cannot refer to certain kinds of things, e.g. trees, if one has no causal interaction at all with them, or with things in terms of which they can be described." (Putnam 1981, 16-17) In other words if you can say that you are a brain in a vat, and the expressions you use have the same meaning as those of any other speaker, then it follows that you are not a brain in a vat.

The effectiveness and validity of this argument have been questioned in many ways: The argument has been accused of circularity (to show that we are not brains in a vat, Putnam appeals to the concept of

external reference, which already assumes that we have real contact with the external world); the argument has been criticized for being based on a poor, one-dimensional theory of the meaning of concepts (the argument is based on the idea that the meaning of concepts is formed only through causal interaction with objects or fragments of the external world; In fact, many words acquire meaning through cultural conventions or interpersonal interaction); the argument has been criticized for not being sophisticated enough. (Putnam could be talking about a brain that has simulations among its memories, including those that relate to real interactions with the external world), etc. Despite these possible objections, I think the argument has undeniable epistemological and metaphysical consequences.

As I said, the point of the brain-in-a-vat argument is to show that metaphysical realism is compatible with a form of global skepticism that is epistemologically unacceptable; by rejecting global skepticism, one would ultimately reject metaphysical realism. Thomas Nagel has noted the close connection between the realist perspective and skepticism: "The possibility of skepticism is built into our ordinary thoughts, in virtue of the realism that they automatically assume and their pretensions to go beyond experience." (Nagel 1986, 73) If metaphysical realism understands the world as a fixed set of states of affairs independent of any mind, then there can be a complete and true description of the way the world is. But this true description of the world is not the result of an epistemological performance by a subject, but the result of a correspondence between propositions and things, without any human mind being involved in this game. In other words, there is a pre-existing world and a definitive description of it, regardless of whether there is an epistemic subject capable of ascertaining or asserting this. This kind of characterization of the world is accepted, implicitly or explicitly, by various realist, materialist, or physicalist philosophers. They claim that the world is independent of human language, classification, and conceptualization. But if the world is independent of any human conceptualization, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which a brain in a vat constructs accurate epistemic grounds and justifications for a set of opinions without reference to the world, despite believing otherwise. If metaphysical realism is indeed a valid philosophical position, then it necessarily follows that global skepticism is also a valid position. This is because metaphysical realism allows for the possibility that a subject who is not directly connected to the phenomena of the world can develop well-founded opinions about the world. However, if the subject is not connected to the world, it is unable to form accurate opinions about the world that are properly founded. It is therefore imperative that we consider the possibility that our opinions about the external world may be mistaken, despite their intrinsic soundness. Consequently, if we accept that there is no correlation between truthfulness and a subject's epistemological endeavors,

a doctrine tacitly accepted by metaphysical realism, then all the subject's epistemic opinions, including those that are well-founded from his point of view, are incapable of accurately representing the world in its actual state. Consequently, to reject global skepticism, it would be necessary to abandon the tenets of metaphysical realism.

From Lance P. Hickey's perspective, the brain-in-a-vat scenario represents a particular manifestation of this pervasive global skepticism. It depicts a scenario in which all our beliefs about the world are susceptible to being false, even if they appear to be well-founded. Consequently, if it can be demonstrated that humans cannot be brains in a vat, then it can be inferred that metaphysical realism is invalid. Or, to present this in a more systematic format, Lance P. Hickey offers the following line of reasoning:

1. If metaphysical realism is indeed a valid philosophical position, then global skepticism is a logical consequence.

2. If global skepticism is a possibility, then the hypothesis that we may be a brain in a vat can be considered.

3. But we cannot be a brain in a vat.

4. Therefore, the philosophical position of metaphysical realism is false.

In the context of Putnam's philosophy, the brain-in-a-vat argument is not a plea for an understanding of the world as a reality simulated by an evil agent or an omniscient Programmer. Rather, it is a tool used to denounce the idea that reality is a fixed collection of objects to which only one true description corresponds, regardless of what one epistemic subject or another thinks. In contrast, Putnam's internal realism posits that while empirical inputs shape our understanding of reality, they are in turn inherently shaped by human concepts and vocabularies. These conceptually biased inputs are therefore superior to the absence of inputs. Furthermore, Putnam claims that human objectivity and perspective are superior to the divine eye perspective presupposed by metaphysical realism. This latter perspective is fundamentally inaccessible to an epistemic subject. In other words, the reality that we humans can enjoy is a reality of human objectivity and rationality. The idea of a pure reality, uncontaminated by our concepts or vocabularies, is a flawed philosophical idea that leads to global skepticism. In Putnam's words, "but a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects within the conceptual scheme of those users. 'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. We cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description." (Putnam 1981, 52) In conclusion, if reality is a construct shaped by our conceptual vocabulary and schemata, then reality can only be experienced as a human conceptual and linguistic simulation. Accordingly, Putnam posits that external reality is, at its fundamental level, an intricate and enigmatic

simulation, a transparent simulation, a simulation with a texture in which sensory inputs and concepts are interwoven to the point of indistinguishability, in which sensory inputs are shaped by the constraints of human language.

2. Physical reality understood as simulation.

If Putnam did not use the brain-in-a-vat argument to suggest that the physical or social world is objectively a simulation, but only to reject metaphysical realism because it would imply global skepticism, the Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom has constructed an argument, the simulation argument that tests the credibility of this hypothesis, which blatantly contradicts common sense. The most articulate form of this argument can be found in Nick Bostrom's 2003 article *Are You Living in a Computer Simulation*? Here he asks whether the physical and social worlds are not more like simulations in a computer than autonomous, original realities, and what the possible answers to this question might be.

In the introduction to the article, Nick Bostrom elucidates the fundamental tenets of his approach. Many predictions made by eminent techno-philosophers and futurologists indicate that the computing power that will be available in the future will be significantly greater than that which is currently available. Even the computing power that is currently available is not to be overlooked. The advent of quantum computers or those constructed from nuclear matter or plasma could potentially lead to the overcoming of the current limitations of computational power. If this prediction is indeed accurate, one potential use of these advanced computational capabilities could be to conduct comprehensive simulations of historical societies or individuals. Such simulations could be driven by a range of motivations, including scientific, artistic, or religious pursuits, or even for purely recreational purposes. The sheer computational power of these future computers would allow for the parallel execution of numerous such simulations, greatly enhancing the scope and complexity of the simulations that could be conducted. It is evident that a comprehensive replication of the physical world is unnecessary; instead, a simulation that is sufficiently realistic to avoid any irregularities or discontinuities is sufficient. Let us posit that these simulated humans are conscious. This would be the case if the simulations were sufficiently fine-grained and if the assumption of substrate-independence of consciousness were correct. This assumption is a tenet of the philosophy of mind and posits that consciousness is not an essential property of neural networks based on carbon in biological skulls. It is therefore possible that consciousness could be implemented on silicon-based processors inside a computer, which could perform the same functions. It may therefore be posited that the overwhelming majority of

minds, including our own, do not belong to the original race, but rather to humans that have been simulated by advanced descendants of an original race. If this hypothesis is correct, it would be rational to conclude that we are probably among the simulated rather than the original biological minds. This is also because the number of possible simulations could in principle be much larger than the number of real physical worlds, which means that the probability of our existence in a simulation is much higher than that of our existence in the real world. However, if we do not accept the premise that we are currently residing in a computer simulation, there is no reason to believe that our descendants will engage in the creation of numerous such simulations of our ancestors.

The conclusion proposed by Nick Bostrom is based on several hypotheses that are either probably or open to discussion and do not take the form of a definitive assertion. The article's conclusion presents three exclusive disjunctives: either (1) the human species will become extinct before reaching a "posthuman" stage, or (2) a posthuman civilization will not undertake a significant number of simulations of their evolutionary history (or variations of it), or (3) we are almost certainly living in a computer simulation. It can therefore be concluded that the hypothesis that there is a significant chance that we will eventually become posthuman entities engaged in the simulation of our evolutionary history is almost certainly false unless we are already living in a simulation. Bostrom does not assert that one of these conclusions is more probable than the others; rather, he posits that one of them must be true. However, according to Bostrom, the possibility expressed by alternative (3) is the most philosophically intriguing. If we live in a simulation, then the observable cosmos is only a small part of the totality of physical existence.

The physical laws that govern our observable universe may or may not align with the physical laws that govern the universe in which the computer executes the simulation of our observable universe. The world we see is "real" in a sense, but it is not at the fundamental level of reality. Simulated civilizations can become post-human. Subsequently, they can run simulations of their ancestors on the powerful computers they construct within their simulated universe. Such computers would be classified as "virtual machines," a fundamental concept in the field of computer science. Virtual machines can be constructed in a hierarchical manner, whereby one machine can simulate another, and so on, in a multitude of iterative stages. The continued creation of simulations of ancestors would provide compelling evidence against (1) and (2), leading to the conclusion that we are indeed living in a simulation. Furthermore, it would suggest that the posthumans who run our simulation are themselves simulated beings and that their creators may also be simulated beings. What are the philosophical

implications and potential benefits of this science-fiction thought experiment?

Firstly, the experiment may serve to indicate that reality may be constituted by multiple levels and greater complexity than that which is typically accepted by physicalist philosophers. Nevertheless, a compelling counterargument to this perspective on reality as a multileveled simulation is that, as Bostrom has argued, simulating even a single posthuman civilization could be prohibitively expensive. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the world we live in would have been constructed intentionally with such a high level of complexity.

Secondly, David Chalmers posited that the simulation hypothesis should nevertheless be taken seriously, at least for statistical reasons. This is because, for every unsimulated person, there may be, in principle, thousands and millions of people who are simulated. The question thus arises as to how an individual can be certain that they are not themselves a simulated entity. Given the vast number of possible simulated beings, the probability of my being an unsimulated individual is low. Consequently, from a statistical perspective, it is more reasonable to conclude that we are in a simulation than that we are not.

Thirdly, the simulation argument should be treated with the utmost seriousness, as David Chalmers asserts in Chapter Two of *Reality+*. It is impossible to prove that we are not in a computer simulation. The rationale is straightforward: any evidence of conventional physical reality could be replicated through simulation. In principle, any phenomenon could be replicated in the finest detail. (Chalmers 2022, 20-42)

Fourthly, Chalmers posits that if we were to inhabit a simulation, the environment would be perceived as real to us as it is in the present. The world as we experience it would remain unaltered were we to discover that its basis or its ontological foundation was constituted by computational sequences rather than elementary particles. A world composed of bits and one composed of elementary particles would not differ phenomenologically; the experiences of the inhabitants of the two worlds would be identical. The only difference would be regarding the different metaphysical assumptions concerning the fundamental nature of reality. The simulation hypothesis does not affect our belief in the reality of the external world; however, it does prompt a more profound reflection on this topic. Ultimately, David Chalmers posits that the simulation argument represents a more profound inquiry into the nature of our knowledge about the external world. Our understanding of the external world is an understanding of its underlying structure, its logical or mathematical structure, according to Chalmers. Regardless of the scenario in which I find myself as an epistemic subject, I can conclude that there is an external world because I have access to an essential aspect of it, namely the logical-mathematical structure of the

world. This is in contrast to other forms of access, such as sensory experience, which may be inconsistent or illusory.

Fifthly, the simulation argument offers a valuable opportunity to rethink the foundations of reality in a context where physicalism is dominant. It suggests that reality may not be solely based on physical systems or processes. The simulation hypothesis, presented in the context of techno-philosophy, reveals a series of non-physicalist problems and solutions imbued with theological and religious nuances. The question is who or what entity is the creator of the simulation? One might inquire whether the programmer in question belongs to the next universe. It is therefore pertinent to inquire whether this programmer can be considered a deity of our world. It is therefore pertinent to inquire whether the programmer of the world can be considered to possess omniscience and omnipotence concerning our world. It is evident that, when these elements are taken into consideration, the hypothesis of the simulation can be situated within the ideational zone of creationism. This implies that the reality we perceive could not have emerged without the deliberate action of a designing agent. In his book *God, Human, Animal, Machine: Technology, Metaphor, and the Search for Meaning* (2021), Meghan O'Gieblyn outlines that if we conceptualize the cosmos as an immense computer, designed by a specific entity, the apparent order in nature becomes intelligible. This order has been programmed into the software that governs our universe and is therefore part of the digital fabric of our world. Furthermore, O'Gieblyn highlights the emergence of a theology of simulation, as evidenced by a multitude of academic articles written by proponents of this hypothesis.

Similarly, picking up an idea from the philosopher David Pearce, David Chalmers remarks that the "simulation argument is the most interesting argument for the existence of God in a long time." (Chalmers 2022, 124) However, O'Gieblyn notes that even if the simulation hypothesis posits that our reality is a simulated one, it still fails to explain the genesis of zero-level reality. Furthermore, it is silent on the subject of the physical universe that would support the simulation of our world. In conclusion, the hypothesis is merely an exercise in imagination and does not provide an essential explanation about reality.

Sixthly, the simulation hypothesis may represent a sample of pseudo-science or a pseudo-philosophical problem, designed to stimulate the interest and imagination of some categories of intellectuals. This hypothesis does not solve any important problem of science or philosophy. In Chapter 5 of *Existential Physics* (Hoffenfelder, 2022), Sabine Hoffenfelder posits that the simulation hypothesis is perceived as increasingly attractive by individuals, regardless of their philosophical orientation, who possess limited knowledge of physics. Firstly, the physicist asserts that it is not the notion of residing in a simulation that is unscientific, but rather the

theological implications of this concept. These include the existence of a reality beyond the simulation and the idea of an omnipotent programmer who manipulates or contravenes the laws of nature. Furthermore, the argument is predicated on the flawed assumption that consciousness can be digitally simulated. However, there is currently no evidence to suggest that consciousness can be replicated in this way, nor is there any understanding of how it arises or how it could be technologically produced. However, Hoffenfelder identifies the most theoretically weak aspect of the argument as the assertion that sophisticated physical effects could be reproduced in detail using software designed by the Programmer. However, any individual with a correct understanding of physics is aware that the physical foundations of our reality cannot be replaced by anything else. Moreover, the mathematical and ontological incompatibilities between general relativity and the standard model of elementary particles proposed by quantum mechanics present a significant challenge in attempting to reproduce them in a single computer algorithm. It is not a solution to this problem to suggest that the algorithm will run on a quantum computer, which is a significantly more powerful computer. The construction of explanatory-predictive models for natural phenomena can be approximated on a computer using some laws of nature. Nevertheless, the complete simulation of all the laws of nature within a single algorithm remains an unfeasible theoretical undertaking. If this were feasible, it would entail deriving all the laws of nature from a single theory of everything. However, this remains a metaphysical aspiration rather than a tangible scientific position. Moreover, there are non-linear phenomena in nature, such as climate or weather, which, in principle, cannot be fully simulated by an algorithmic model. In conclusion, Sabine Hoffenfelder concludes that the simulation argument is not a scientifically tenable position: even if it is not necessarily wrong, it requires more faith and imagination than logic or physics to take it seriously.

        And the famous physicist Frank Wilczek accuses the simulation hypothesis of being inconsistent and unjustified from the perspective of physical science on the structure of the world we live in: if we lived in a computerized simulation, we could not explain why there is a dizzying complexity of physical reality beyond what we perceive at the sensory level. The laws of physics have a lot of hidden complexity, and physical reality has invisible microstructures that would be of no use if reality were actually simulated. After all, if the reality in which we live is simulated, what laws would the reality in which our world is simulated obey? In other words, the simulation hypothesis would unnecessarily and inexplicably complicate the picture of the world by shifting the burden of physically explaining the world from the world we live in towards the reality in which our world is simulated. If we accept the consistency of the counter-arguments, we

should consider the simulation hypothesis to be a mere metaphor, a conceptual tool that allows us to reformulate some classical questions about the nature of reality. From the perspective of physicists, if we take this hypothesis literally, we run the risk of being perceived as irrational, adhering to techno-theological fundamentalism that is no more rational than other classical ideological or religious fundamentalisms that are unanimously abhorred today. Similar observations have been made by John Barrow, who notes that the multitude of complex effects resulting from the action of natural laws would be impossible and useless to reproduce in a simulated world. Furthermore, if we were to inhabit a simulated universe, the accumulation of programming errors should become evident to the inhabitants. But, this does not occur. (Barrow 2007, 483) At his turn, Paul Davies concludes that the simulation hypothesis is inherently flawed due to "the infinite tower of turtles" paradox. This essentially posits that for a simulation to exist there must be a programmer outside of it, who in turn must be programmed by an external entity, and so on. Furthermore, the hypothesis is untestable and rests on quasi-theological assumptions. (Davies 2007, 496-497)

Notwithstanding the reservations articulated by certain physicists concerning the simulation hypothesis, David Chalmers' book, entitled *Reality+*, proposes that we accord it considerable attention. David Chalmers posits that there is sufficient evidence to accept that a virtual or digitally simulated reality can be considered a full reality in its own right. Rather than being regarded as fictional or fantastical representations of a non-existent reality, or as distortions of things that exist independently of the mind, the entities encountered in virtual reality (VR) are simply real, even if they have an underlying nature that differs from that of other things. The tables encountered in virtual reality are, in fact, real tables, albeit constructed of "bits and bytes" rather than the more traditional wood and metal. David Chalmers refers to this mode of conceptualizing the nature of reality as "simulation realism". "In a perfect simulation, things are perfectly real. The same goes for other Cartesian scenarios, such as Descartes' evil-demon scenario and Hilary Putnam's brain-in-a-vat scenario. Generalizing simulation realism to these scenarios, we arrive at the no-illusion view vision of Cartesian scenarios." (Chalmers 2022, 119) In other words, according to Chalmers, "the subject in Descartes' evil demon scenario is not undergoing an illusion." (Chalmers 2022, 122)

David Chalmers warns that the shift from the evil demon and brain-in-a-vat hypotheses to 'simulation realism' is not just a change of metaphorical packaging; he is convinced that there is a fundamental way in which the use of modern technology strengthens the argument. The simulation hypothesis may once have been a philosophical fantasy, but with accelerating technological progress it has become a serious hypothesis.

(Chalmers 2022, 53-54) After all, we know that VR machines exist; all Chalmers asks us to imagine is that VR machines will become far more sophisticated and powerful than they are now. So we will have to take seriously the idea that we live, or could live, in a perfect simulation indistinguishable from physical reality, not just as a tool for dismissing global skepticism, but as a distinct and legitimate metaphysical position.

Considering the simulation hypothesis, as well as Chalmers' ideas and analysis from *Reality+* on the possibility of perfect simulations of the world and interpersonal interactions in virtual reality, we can add at least two objections to those already raised against the simulation hypothesis (Bostrom's variant). The *first objection* concerns the possibility of constructing a general artificial intelligence. If a VR machine can indeed replicate all aspects of our experience, then it must also be able to replicate authentic conversations between people. To do this, it must solve the biggest problem facing AI research, the problem of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). While AI machines have been able to demonstrate specific intelligence in well-defined tasks (e.g. chess or GO), no one has yet figured out how to create the kind of intelligence we have - general intelligence. Even if the problem could be solved in principle, no one yet knows what direction to take. (Larson 2021, 30-32)

The *second objection* concerns the possibility of technological reproduction of the phenomenon of consciousness. Simulation realism takes as true the position expressed in the hypothesis of the substrate independence of consciousness. According to this hypothesis, consciousness is not structurally bound to the carbon-based biological neural networks inside a skull: it could just as well be housed in the silicon-based processors inside a computer. However, this hypothesis is far from being confirmed or disproved while there is still heated debate about the true nature of consciousness. Moreover, no one has any idea how subjective experience, emotions, feelings, free will, and moral responsibility could be digitally simulated.

Conclusions

If we look at the different simulation arguments (Descartes, Putnam, Bostrom, Chalmers), we must admit that our sensory experience is largely compatible with either being deceived by an evil genius or being immersed and living in a simulated reality. This observation helped the four philosophers to construct arguments to achieve different ends. Descartes constructed an argument against global skepticism, Putnam argued against skepticism and in favor of metaphysical realism, Bostrom argued against the physical foundations of the world we live in and in favor of a mathematical-informational foundation of the world, and Chalmers argued in favor of a

realism of simulation. If the arguments of simulation constructed by Descartes and Putnam are to be understood in a methodological key, as provisional elements necessary for the elimination of global skepticism and metaphysical realism, then for Bostrom and Chalmers the hypothesis of simulation implies a distinct, consistent metaphysical position; they even believe in a realism of simulation. Understood in a methodological key, the arguments of Descartes and Putnam proved fruitful. From a metaphysical perspective, the arguments of Bostrom and Chalmers have not solved any of the existing problems concerning the nature of reality; it is true that they have provoked much discussion and raised many questions, but they have not provided pertinent answers. These arguments have prompted us to consider alternative foundations of the physical world and to postulate the existence of a God-programmer. However, they have not yielded any conclusive answers. The roots of these speculative discussions are the realism of simulations in VR and the theoretically high probability that humans are simulated rather than unsimulated. Nevertheless, the feasibility of realistic simulations in VR does not necessarily imply that our actual reality is, in fact, a simulation. It is an argument based on analogy. No epistemic logic can be invoked to justify this claim. Similarly, it is not possible to infer from the hypothetical possibility that humans can be simulated that we are, in fact, simulated. Similarly, one might posit the plausibility of the hypothesis that humans are illegitimate sons of Zeus or that we are angels banished from heaven. Nevertheless, such reasoning would be regarded as implausible by experts in genetics or metaphysics.

On the other hand, beyond the imagination of the philosophers who support it, the simulation realism hypothesis does not have sufficient reason on its side: it is not supported by any empirical or natural scientific evidence (moreover, we have found that physicists credibly argue that the detailed physical structure of the world we live in is incompatible with the simulation hypothesis), it legitimizes skepticism about natural science (if we really live in a simulation, what value and how much truth do the results of natural science contain), it explains nothing about the reality outside the simulation in which we live, it does not explain anything about the nature or intentions of the programmer who would have simulated the world in which we live, it violates Occam's principle of simplicity by postulating an unnecessary complexity of simulated worlds that exist in other worlds, it cannot explain the existence of defining characteristics of human beings (conscience, emotions, free will, altruism, moral responsibility), it cannot justify the existence of crimes and wars in our world.

From my perspective, the simulation hypothesis and simulation realism can be seen as the philosophical consequences of the discovery and widespread use of new technologies, including the Internet, virtual worlds, and artificial intelligence. The new technologies have always had the power,

at the level of the imaginary, to be close to magic, and have been seen as a legitimate source of metaphors that have served to approximate solutions to as yet unsolved scientific and metaphysical problems: consciousness, the brain, the world as a whole, God. The simulation hypothesis and simulation realism have the merit of making accessible to educated people of the 21st century several classical problems of philosophy (the problem of the foundations of reality, the possibility of the existence of a creator, the possibility of reliable knowledge, the problem of the nature of man, of consciousness, etc.) in terms and with the help of metaphors with which they are familiar. It seems probable that as the novelty of these new technologies (Internet, VR, AI) fades and the relevance of the meanings proposed by the metaphors generated by these technologies in the philosophical arena become less significant, the minds of thinkers will seek to invoke other suggestive metaphors generated by the technologies that which will capture the imagination of future generations.

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Spinoza and his Relationship to the Hermeneutics of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Super-Commentaries and the Semantics of Narrative

Abstract: In this article, I will seek to clarify the nature of Spinoza's relationship to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra. First, by analyzing Spinoza's thesis concerning the hermeneutics of R. Ibn Ezra in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (TTP). Then I will confront this thesis with the commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra himself, and with some great commentaries devoted to them. Finally, I will propose a semantic approach to the different narrative levels of the biblical text, capable of resolving several textual difficulties that drew Spinoza's attention.

Keywords: Spinoza, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, super-commentaries, hermeneutics, narrative, semantics, Midrash, Historical criticism

The theoretical approaches of R. Ibn Ezra (1089/1092-1167) and Spinoza (1632-1677) have been compared, emphasizing their common interest in the philology of Hebrew, in the interpretation of the Bible, their preference for its literal reading (*pshat*) to the detriment of homiletical reading, as well as the importance of scientific knowledge.[2] It is the elliptical

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[1] Concerning the commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra on the Pentateuch, I have used the classic edition of the Miqra'ot Gedolot. The scientific edition can be found in the Keter Edition (Menahem Cohen, Ed.), Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, 2022. I used also the version published by H. Kreisel (Ed.), Hamishah qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham Eben 'Ezr'a. Beer Sheva, Ben Gurion University Press, 2007. Concerning Spinoza's works, all translations from Hebrew and Latin are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Regarding the works of Spinoza, I refer to the Latin edition: Baruch de Spinoza Opera, edited by Carl Gebhardt, Heidelberg, Universitätsbuchhandlung Carl Winter, 1925. However, regarding the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus I use the Latin text established by Fokke Akkerman and published bilingually by Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François. Moreau, Traité Théologico-Politique. Paris, PUF, 1999. The English translations of Spinoza's texts are mine. Regarding the transliteration of Hebrew, I have generally followed the system of Ch. L. Echols and Th. Legrand Transliteration of Hebrew Consonants, Vowels, and Accents, etc. Academia.edu.
https://www.academia.edu/5388085/Transliteration_of_Hebrew_Consonants_Vowels_and_Accents_etc

[2] Tamar M. Rudavsky, The Science of Scripture: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Spinoza on Biblical Hermeneutics. In Steven Nadler, Ed., *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*.

character of R. Ibn Ezra's interpretations that allowed Spinoza to project into them what has been called his "Marranism of reason," which forced him to hide his inner thoughts and philosophical truth from the multitude.[3] Indeed, according to Spinoza, R. Ibn Ezra really thought that Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*. However, because of the relentlessness of the Pharisees, he could not openly support his thesis. Spinoza thus praises R. Ibn Ezra, describing him as "a man of freer complexion and great erudition" (*liberioris ingenii vir et non mediocris eruditionis*), and he emphasizes that he had to hide his own opinions because "he did not dare to explain his thought openly" (*non ausus est mentem suam aperte explicare*).[4] This article aims to examine the use that Spinoza makes of R. Abraham Ezra's texts, confronting it with the literal analysis that should be made of this author. In doing so, il points out the probable influence that the super-commentaries on R. Abraham Ezra's hermeneutics may have had on Spinoza.

The ambiguous relations of Spinoza to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

Recall that contrary to the apparent esteem which Spinoza expressed with respect to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, in Chapter II of the *TTP* Spinoza opposes R. Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the etymology of the term prophecy (*nevu'ah*), stressing that he "did not have an exact knowledge of Hebrew" (*qui linguam Hebraicam non adeo exacte novit*), despite that R. Ibn Ezra is considered one of the greatest Hebraist of the Middle Ages, having himself written five books of Hebrew grammar.[5] Nevertheless, Spinoza developed his criticism of the Bible on the basis of the hermeneutics of R. Ibn Ezra. Spinoza began by examining his explanation of the verse of *Deuteronomy* I: 2, including what he calls the "mystery of the twelve" (*mysterium duodecim*): "On the other side of the Jordan, through the wilderness, in the Araba.... If you understand the secret of the twelve" as well as "and Moses wrote" (*Deuteronomy* 31:9), "and the Canaanites were then in the land" (*Genesis* 12:6), "on the mountain God will appear" (*Genesis* 22:14), "here is his bestead, an iron bedstead, then you will recognize the truth." (*Deuteronomy* I:2). If Spinoza quotes the words of R. Ibn Ezra in full, he also specifies what R. Ibn Ezra never said explicitly: "With these few words, he indicates and at the same time establishes, that it was not Moses who wrote the *Pentateuch* but someone else who lived much later; and finally

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Cambridge University Press, 2014: 59-60

[3] Yirmiahu Yovel, *Spinoza and other heretics*. Princeton University Press, 1989, 92

[4] Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, VIII, 3, 326-327

[5] Luba R. Charlap, Abraham Ibn-Ezra's viewpoint regarding the Hebrew language and the biblical text in the context of medieval environment. *Folia linguistica histórica*. 26, 1-2, 2005, 1-12. Cf. Jacques J. Rozenberg, The Spinozist Conception of Prophecy versus the Jewish Traditional Commentaries. *Philosophy & Theology*. 35, 1, 2024.77-110.

that the book written by Moses was another work" (*His autem paucis indicat simulque ostendit non fuisse Mosen, qui Pentateuchon scripsit, sed alium quempiam, qui longe post vixit, et denique quem Moses scripsit librum, alium fuisse*).[6] It should be noted that Spinoza used the commentary of R. Ibn Ezra published by Johannes Buxtorf I.[7] However, this text does not mention all the versions of the commentary, unlike the *Miqr'aot Gedolot*, a work that Spinoza did not own, but that he certainly knew. Indeed, this work points out, in parentheses, on the verse of *Deuteronomy* 1:2, next to the word "shnaym" (two), that of "sarym" (princes), and Spinoza in fact took up this version because Buxtorf's version, mentioning "ten princes" (*ha-sarym 'eser*) that did not seem comprehensible to him.[8] However, if we retain the version not retained by Spinoza, instead of speaking of the last twelve verses of the *Pentateuch* as Spinoza would eventually admit, we can understand, as Michael Friedlander proposes, that in fact R. Ibn Ezra refers to the sacrifices of the twelve princes or chiefs (*nesy'im*) mentioned in the verses of *Numbers* 7 : 12-83. He would then express his astonishment at the repetition, twelve times and without the slightest variation, of the sacrifices that the princes have brought at the time of the inauguration of the Tabernacle. As a result, R. Ibn Ezra would then not refer to the last twelve verses of Deuteronomy.[9] Also according to Friedlander, the expression commonly used by R. Ibn Ezra: "it involves a mystery (or a secret)" (*yesh lo sod*), and underlined by Spinoza, never expresses any critical research concerning the coherence of a biblical text or the authenticity of one of its authors, but it refers to a philosophical aspect that R. Ibn Ezra thinks he has identified in certain passages of the Bible.[10] The notion of mystery or secret (*sod*) refers to notions or situations whose true meanings are not always understood by people. From a textual point of view, it simply connotes the different significations that can be deduced from certain verses of the Bible.[11] This remark helps to understand why R. Ibn Ezra criticized Christian biblical hermeneutics for constantly inventing "deep meaning" (*sod*).[12]

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[6] Spinoza, *TTP*, VIII, 3, 326-327

[7] Lagré and Moreau, French translation of the *Tractatus Theologico*-Politicus, 749, note 68.

[8] Johannes Buxtorf, *Biblia Sacra Hebraica & Chaldaica Masora*. L. König, 1618-1619, 191. The version in Gerhardt's Edition (III, 119), which presents the Hebrew expression "hashlym 'eser" is also defective.

[9] Michael Friedlander*, Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*. London, The Society of Hebrew Literature, 1877, 65

[10] Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 62-65

[11] H. Norman Strickman, Abraham ibn Ezra's "Yesod Mora." *Hakirah*. 12, 2011, 140

[12] Mordechai Z. Cohen, *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi*. Brill, 2003, 36

The six critical statements of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra according to Spinoza

In suport of his thesis, Spinoza attributes six statements to R. Ibn R. Ibn Ezra[13]:

1. The first verses of *Deuteronomy*, mentioned above, could not have been written by Moses who did not cross the Jordan (*Mose, qui Jordanem non transivit, scribi non potuit*). However, R. Ibn Ezra limits himself to remarking that these first verses were pronounced in the desert (*bamidbar*), in the plain (*be'aravah*) of the Jordan, without suggesting that Moses was not the author of them. And R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady (1335-1388) specifies that according to R. Ibn Ezra, only the last twelve verses of *Deuteronomy* were written by Joshua.[14] This author composed, in Jerusalem three years before his death, a super-commentary entitled *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. Even though the work was not published until 1722 in Amsterdam, it seems likely that Spinoza read a copy of the manuscript of this work.[15]

2. Spinoza remarks that "the entire book of Moses was transcribed on the sole edge of a single altar (cf. *Deuteronomy* 27: 2-3, and *Joshua* 8:31, etc.), which, according to the rabbis' account, consisted of only twelve stones; from which it appears that the book of Moses was much less extensive than the *Pentateuch*." (*quod totus liber Mosis descriptus fuerit admodum diserte in solo ambitu unius arae* (vide Deuter. Cap. 27. & Josuae, Cap. 8. v. 31. etc.), *quae ex Rabinorum relatione duodecim tantum lapidibus constabat; ex quo sequitur librum Mosis longè minoris fuisse molis, quam Pentateuchon*). However, R. Ibn Ezra, on the verses of *Deuteronomy* 27:1-2, does not mention the question of the completeness of the *Pentateuch*, nor the installation of twelve stones, but he limits himself to pointing out that in order to respect all the commandments (*shmor 'et kol ha-miçwot*) it was necessary to establish some large stones (*'avanym gedolot*) capable of encompassing the content of the Torah. He also reports R. Saadya Gaon's explanation of this verse, to which he subscribes, notifying that it was by no means the whole of the *Pentateuch*, but only a few commandments (*mispar miçwot*), such as the warnings (*hazharot*). Spinoza then attributes to R. Ibn Ezra the thesis that has been described as "curious," according to which the expression "mystery of the twelve"

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[13] Spinoza, *TTP*, VIII, 3, 326-333; Raphael Jospe, *Jewish philosophy in the Middle* Ages. Academic Studies Press, 2009, 184-188

[14] R. Yoseph 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. Reedition. Krakow, 1912, Vol. I, 63.

[15] The work of R. Yoseph Tov ben 'Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfaradi was published in 1722 in Amsterdam, under the title *'Ohel Yoseph*, and included the work of R. Yequty'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (Ed.), *Sefer Margalyot Tovah*. Amsterdam, 1722. It should be noted that the original title of the manuscript does not appear in the catalogue of the *Eç Hayym* Library in Amsterdam. However, there is mention of a manuscript with the same title by R. Shem Tov Shafrut who also comments on R. Abaham Ibn Ezra's commentary on the *Pentateuch*. Cf. R. Shabtaye ben Yoseph Bass, *Siftey Yeshanym*. Amsterdam, 1680, 65.

(*mysterium duodecim*) refers to the twelve stones, which R. Ibn Ezra does not mention at all in his commentary on *Deuteronomy* 27:1-2.[16]

3. Spinoza writes that R. Ibn Ezra "remarks that it is said (*Deuteronomy* 31:9): And Moses wrote the Law-terms which cannot be of Moses, but are of another writer who records the acts and writings of Moses (*dici in Deuter. cap. 31. v. 9. et scripsit Moses legem; quae quidem verba non possunt esse Mosis, sed alterius scriptoris, Mosis facta et scripta narrantis*). Now, in his commentary on *Deuteronomy* 31:9, R. Ibn Ezra limits himself to specifying two things: first, that the Levites are the teachers of the Torah (*morey ha-Torah*), and second, that the expression "Elders of Israel" refers to the members of the *Sanhedryn* (legislative and judicial assembly). He does not make the slightest allusion to the fact that this verse could not have been written by Moses.

4. Spinoza emphasizes the remark of R. Ibn Ezra on the verse of *Genesis* 12: 6 "the Canaanite was then in the land," clearly ruling out that this was still the case at the time this verse was written. This is what R. Ibn Ezra, in his note on this passage, is indicating in the words: "and the Canaanite was then in that land; it seems that Canaan (a grandson of Noah) took the land of the Canaanite which was in the hands of another; if this is not true, there is a mystery in this thing, and who understands it should be silent (*yesh lo sod we-ha-maskyl ydom*)." That is, if Canaan invaded those regions, then the sense will be that 'the Canaanite was already in that land at that time' as distinct from a previous period when it was inhabited by another people. But if Canaan was the first to cultivate those regions (as follows from *Genesis* Ch. 10), then the text excludes the present time, i.e. the time of the writer, which is not therefore the time of Moses, because in his time they still possessed that territory. This is the mystery about which Ibn Ezra recommends silence.[17] Spinoza's conclusion that Moses could not have been the writer of this verse, and that "this is the mystery (which Ibn Ezra) recommends keeping quiet." (*hoc est mysterium, quod tacendum commendat*) seems to be in accordance with the super-commentary of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady. However, the latter emphasizes that, in the event that the Canaanite had not conquered his land from another people, the

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[16] Warren Zev Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve." In Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Michael A. Rosenthal (Eds). Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatrise. A Critical Guide. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 51. Harvey, (54), reminds us that Spinoza may have been influenced by his reading of *Leviathan,* where Hobbes speaks of the twelve stones, pointing out, however, against Spinoza's assertion, that on these stones the entire *Pentateuch* was not reproduced. Hobbes, *Leviathan.* John C. A. Gaskin (Ed.). Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, 254 and 345.
[17] Spinoza, *TTP* VIII, 4. I use here the English translation of the *Theological-Political Treatise* by Jonathan Israel, Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 120.

possible late writing of this verse would have been prophetic, and he adds: "It does not matter whether it was Moses who wrote it or whether another prophet wrote it (*mah ly shekatvo Mosheh 'o shekatvo navy' 'aḥer*) since their words are equally true, and they proceed from prophecy (*ho'yl we-divrey kulam 'emet we-hem benevu'ah*)."[18]

As Spinoza would do, Hobbes, who seems to have had indirect access to R. Ibn Ezra's super-commentaries,[19] also rejected the prophetic aspect of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha-Ṣfarady's remark. He first emphasized, with regard to the words attributed to Moses, describing his own death: "For it were a strange interpretation, to say Moses spoke of his own sepulcher (though by prophecy)," and then denied the authorship of Moses on the verse of *Genesis* 12:6: "and the Canaanite was then in the land; which must needs to be the words of one that wrote when the Canaanite was not in the land; and consequently, not of Moses, who died before he came into it."[20] However, as R. Yehuda Mosqony (approximately between 1327-1375) has pointed out, the majority of commentators on R. Ibn Ezra have gone misguided (*nevuku*) in trying to account for the author's real intention.[21] Indeed, the term then (*'az*), can denote both a past or present event. In this sense, on the verse of *Genesis* 12:6, R. Ibn Ezra has only presented two possibilities of interpretation, one in the past and the other in the present. As R. Shmuel Tsarçah (second half of the 14th century) points out in his super-commentary *Meqor Ḥayym*, according to the first interpretive possibility, the term "'az" means that the Canaanite was not originally on his land, and in this case the verse does not imply any mystery. According to the second possibility, it was at the time of the writing of the verse that the Canaanite was no longer on his land, and there would then be a mystery because it would imply that Moses did not write it.[22] Nevertheless,

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[18] R. Yoseph 'Alam ha-Sfarady, Tsafnat Pa'eneah. I, 91-92. The author refers to the Talmud Sanhedryn 99a, which qualifies as a heretic anyone who, while admitting that the entire Torah is of Divine origin except for a verse that would have been added by Moses. As I will explain later, according to R. Ibn Ezra, the prohibition of making any addition to the Biblical text concerns only the commandments and not the narrations. However, the Midrash Rabah Mishley noted that, in the verse of Proverbs 25:1, the term "he'etyqu" does not mean to copy, even less write, but indicates that Hezekiah's servants only "explained" (pershu) the Proverbs.

[19] Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, 404-405. This author has emphasized the role of the Hebraist bishop, Alonso Tostado (Alphonsus Tostatus) (1410-1455) in the dissemination of the writings of R. Ibn Ezra among the Christian exegetes.

[20] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 33, 253

[21] R. Yehuda Mosqony, *'Even ha-'Ezer*, Ḥayym Kreisel (Ed.), Ben Gurion University, Makon Bialik, 2021, I, 117

[22] R. Shmuel Tsarçah, Meqor Hayym. In R. Yequty'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (Ed.), *Ṣefer margalyot ṭovah*. Amsterdam, 1722, 19a. Similarly, R. Mosheh ben Yehuda min ha-Na'arym (14th century) adheres to the first interpretation. In 'Ofer 'Ely'or, *R. Mosheh ben Yehuda min ha-*

R. Ibn Ezra only mentions this interpretive possibility, without however adhering to it. As R. Yoseph Caspi (1280-1345) points out, R. Ibn Ezra even rejects this second interpretation.

Indeed, when God decreed that Abraham would inherit the land of Canaan, Abraham then found that this land was dominated by Canaan, and he feared that God then gave up all power over this land, and so he might not inherit it. However, according to R. Yehuda Mosqony, the verse in *Genesis* 12:6 emphasizes the strength of God's promise concerning the inheritance of the land of Canaan, which was to take effect only when Abraham's descendants were sufficiently numerous.[23] This is why R. Ibn Ezra hypothesizes that it is possible that Canaan had previously conquered it from another people, which then left Abraham with hope of inheriting it, as Canaan had done previously. Otherwise, there would be a mystery, leaving Abraham's hope of inheriting this territory in vain, leading him to think that Divine Providence had abandoned the earthly world.[24] Even if the identity of the author of the *Perush ha-sodot le-R. Ibn Ezra* has been the subject of debate, and the authorship of R. Yoseph Caspi has been questioned,[25] it is worth recalling the remark of R. Yoseph Caspi, in his work *Parashat ha-Kesef*, concerning the verse of *Genesis* 12:6: "And the Canaanite was then on the earth." He then indicates that it was Moses who wrote it, thus emphasizing that for R. Ibn Ezra, Moses was indeed the author of this verse.[26] This is in fact what R. Ibn Ezra himself confirms in his Introduction to his commentary on the *Psalms*: "for there is no doubt among the Israelites that Moses our Master wrote the book of *Genesis*" *(ky 'eyn safeq beyn ha-Isra'elym ky ṣefer Ber'eshyt ky Mosheh 'Adonenu katvu)*.[27] Thus we can understand that the possible mystery concerning the verse of *Genesis* 12:6 does not concern its non-Mosaic redaction.[28]

Na'arym. By'yur 'al ha-Torah me' and R. 'Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a. Beer Sheba, Ben Gurion University, 2015, 39.

[23] R. Yehuda Mosqony, *'Even ha-'Ezer.* H. Kreisel (Ed.), I, 118

[24] R. Yoseph Caspi, *Perush ha-sodot le-R. Ibn Ezra.* Pressburg, 1903, 152.

[25] Cf. Hannah Kosher, Lash'elat meḥabero shel "By'yur ha-sodot le-R. ' Eben 'Ezr'a" ha-meyuḥas le-Yosef 'Eben Kaspy. In Mosheh Hallamish (Ed.), *'Aley Shefer.* Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 1990, 108-189.

[26] R. Yoseph Caspi, Parashat ha-Kesef. In Ḥayym Kreisel (Ed.), *Ḥamishah qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a.* 124. It should be noted that the editors of this work have nevertheless indicated in parentheses: "it must be said (ṣaryk l'omar): and Moses did not write (l'o katav)". However, the passage from the By'yur ha-sodot, and especially the statement of R. Ibn Ezra himself, in his commentary on the *Tehilym* that we are reporting, invalidates such a correction.

[27] R. Ibn Ezra, *Perush 'al Tehilym, Aqdamah*

[28] This is why the commentator of the *Awat Nefesh* maintains the Mosaic origin of the entire *Pentateuch*. In Ḥayym Kreisel (Ed.), *Ḥamishah qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a.* 37 and 124-125. The author of the *Awat Nefesh* is still uncertain. Cf. William G. Gärtig, The attribution of the Ibn Ezra supercommentary "Avvat Nefesh" to Asher ben

5. Spinoza then notes that in the verse of *Genesis* 22:14, Mount Moriah is called "the mountain of God," whereas this place will in fact be identified as such only after the building of the Temple by Solomon, several centuries after Moses. Spinoza specifies that the name Moriah was given by the "historian" (*nempe ab historico*), and not by Abraham himself, as is mentioned in II *Chronicles* 3: 2, describing the construction of the First Temple by Solomon.[29] In fact, Moses did not specify on which mountain the Temple will be built, but he only noted: "The place that the Tetragrammaton will choose" to build it (*Deuteronomy* 12:11). Moses did not know the location, which would not be revealed until the time of King David. According to Spinoza, this would clearly prove that Moses was not the author of this verse. Moreover, the term "today" (*ha-yom*) must refer to the time of the Temple when it was possible to practice the three Pilgrimage festivals. Although R. Ibn Ezra also includes this verse in the "secret of the twelve," he does not mention the name Moriah. Following the *Midrash Syfry*, commentators emphasize that the expression "on the mountain where the Tetragrammaton will be seen" (*behar Ha-Shem Yr'aeh*), refers to the prophetic vision of the future Temple that God transmitted to Abraham.[30] Spinoza, denying the possibility of prophecy, could not accept such an exegesis, and he therefore preferred to note a disqualifying anachronism for the claim that Moses was the author of this verse. It should be noted that the name Moriah, contrary to what Spinoza suggests, does not appear in the verse of *Genesis* 22:14, to which he refers. This name is however indicated in the super-commentary of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha- ha-Sfarady, to suggest that this verse may have been written by later prophets and therefore also by prophecy.[31] It is worth mentioning that this name being mentioned later in II *Chronicles* III: 2 does not contradict Abraham's prophecy concerning the future construction of the First Temple.

6. Spinoza then points out problems of a narrative nature. The verse of *Deuteronomy* III, 11 interpolates certain information in the account relating to 'Og, king of Bashan: "the only survivor among the *Ref'aym* (giants), 'Og, king of Bashan, and this is his bed, it was a bed of iron, for this bed is in Rabat among the sons of Ammon and is nine cubits long and four cubits wide according to the measurements of man.*"* According to Spinoza, such a parenthesis (*parenthesis*) proves that it was placed by an author much later than Moses, since he himself did not enter the territory of

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Abraham Crescas reconsidered, *Hebrew Union College Annual.* 66, 1995, 239-257.

[29] Spinoza, *TTP*, Annotation 9, 662-663

[30] *Syfry Devarym* 352; cf. Rashi and Rashbam on *Genesis* 22:14, Qely Yaqar on *Exodus*, 34:23.

[31] R. Yoseph ben Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah.* 112. The *Talmud* asks a similar question regarding the verse of *Genesis* 2:14, which states that the third tributary of the Edenic River is Hydeqel, which flows east of Ashur. Rav Yoseph specifies that 'Ashur is located in Slyqa, which in fact designates the future name of this place. *Qetubot* 10b.

Ammon and therefore could not have known the dimensions of this iron
bed. This was not found until the time of David, who subdued the city of
Rabat, as we can read in II *Samuel* 12: 30. This interpretation seems to have
been suggested by R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer, who said that it was only when
Yoav entered Rabat, under David's command, that he was then able to
ascertain the dimensions of this bed.[32]. However, it should be noted that
this passage from the book of *Samuel*, reported by Spinoza as proof of late
information, makes no mention of the bed of 'Og but only of the crown of
the king of the Ammonites which David seized. It is possible that Spinoza
confused the anecdotes here, after reading the commentary of Rashbam, a
contemporary of R. Ibn Ezra, specifying that the people of Ammon, having
become aware of the divine prohibition against the Children of Israel to
harm their territory and their property. They therefore placed the bed of Og
in their capital Rabat. Rashbam adds that this city was then a royal city, as is
reported precisely in the passage from the book of *Samuel* to which Spinoza
refers.[33]   In fact, as R. Yoseph ben 'Elyezer himself points out, the
information that Moses could not obtain naturally was provided to him by
prophecy.[34]

    It should be noted that R. Ibn Ezra's commentary on the *Pentateuch*
had been written largely against the Karaites, whose rejection of the Oral
Law had led to subjective, and therefore arbitrary, interpretations of the
Bible.[35] R. Ibn Ezra, while maintaining that all the commandments require
explanation by means of transmission (*midivrey qabalah*),[36] at the same time
gave fundamental importance to rational thought.[37] Spinoza's project of

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[32] R. Yoseph ben Eliezer 'Alam ha-S̱farady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneaẖ*, 112

[33] Rashbam on *Deuteronomy* III, 13

[34] R. Yoseph 'Alam ha-S̱farady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneaẖ*, 112

[35] R. Pinẖas Weis, 'Eben 'Ezr'a we-ha-Qar'aym be-Halakah. *Melilah*. I, 1944, 35-53. On the
relations of R. Ibn Ezra to the Karaites, cf. Daniel Frank, Ibn Ezra and the Karaite
Exegetes Aaron ben Joseph and Aaron ben Elijah, in Fernando Dıaz Esteban *et al.* (Eds.),
Abraham Ibn Ezra y su Tiempo. Madrid: Associación Espanola de Orientalistas, 1990, 99–
107. However, it has been possible to emphasize the ambiguous position of R. Ibn Ezra in
relation to the biblical Karaite hermeneutics, combining both an attitude of rejection and
agreement with some of their interpretations. R. Menaẖem M. Kasher (1875-1983) has
suggested that the passages marking R. Ibn Ezra's agreement with the Karaites were late
additions by the copyists of his manuscripts. R. Menaẖem M. Kasher, *Torah Shlemah*. VIII,
Jerusalem, Beyt Torah Shlemah, 1992, 254-255. However, Raphael Itsẖaq (Zinger) Zer has
challenged this thesis of the late addition, showing the agreement of R. Ibn Ezra with some
Karaite commentators. Raphael Itsẖaq Zer, Raby Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a we-parshanut ha-
Miqr'a ha-Qar'ayt. *Megadim*, 2000, 32, 100.

[36] R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, Yoseph Cohen, Uriel Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a we-sod Torah*.
Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University, Second Edition, 2007, 70

[37] Yoseph Cohen, *Hagut ha-fylosofyt shel R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramleh, Shay, 1996, 121-139; David
Lemler, Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une
philosophie juive. *Revue des Etudes Juives*. 168, 3-4, 2009, 460 461.

reducing the biblical text to a purely human editorial text was based on the particular use he made of the writings of R. Ibn Ezra. This project played a fundamental role in the development of deistic thought and the beginnings of Biblical Criticism.[38]

To account for the obscurities of R. Ibn Ezra's commentaries, it is necessary to take into account the possibility, evoked by certain super-commentaries such as R. 'Ele'azar ben Matityah, regarding a corruption of R. Ibn Ezra's texts, as well as attempts at some textual emendation.[39] Michael Friedlander reports the Introduction to the work *Beyt ha-'azer*, where R. Benjamin Espinoza (eighteenth century) "regrets that attacks were made on Ibn Ezra. He quotes the correspondence between R. Raphael Ashkenazi and R. Gamaliel Monsilos and the letter of R. Gad dil Aquila to R. Abiad, adding that he heard of R. Chananyah Kazis in the name of Tachkemoni, that many of the impugned passages in Ibn Ezra's writings were added by Ibn Ezra's son, who had become a Mahomedan."[40]

The verses quoted by Spinoza to demonstrate that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch

According to Spinoza, R. Ibn Ezra did not mention "neither the totality nor the most important" (*nec omnia, nec praecipua*) editorial problems that can be identified in the *Pentateuch*. Thereby, the text of *Deuteronomy* III contains other interpolations. For example, in verses III, 13-14, the post-mosaic historian would have added this explanation to Moses' words: "Jair the son of Manasseh took all the country of Argob unto the coasts of Geshuri and Maachathi; and called them after his own name, Bashan-havoth-Jair, unto this day." For Spinoza, these clarifications provide information that will only be available later, as reported in the verse of I *Chronicles* II, 21-22, thus clearly proving that this information was provided by a historian, who later explained Moses' words. This historian, knowing both the names of the countries that were then common in the time of Moses, as well as their late names, was thus able to make correspondences between the different periods. Now, if it is true that the *Chronicles* constitute a true book of history,[41] it can in no way be deduced from this book that

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[38] Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. London, Routledge, 2003, 25

[39] Ḥayym Kreisel (Ed.), *Ḥamishah qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*, 42, note 31 and 48, note 47. Tamas Visi quotes another commentator, apparently anonymous, who also supports the thesis of the corruption of the original texts of R. Ibn Ezra. Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History*. Ph.D. dissertation. Budapest, 2006, 56, note 132.

[40] Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 248

[41] Cf. Itsḥaq Klymy, *Sefer Divrey Ha-yamym. Ktyvah hystoryt we-'emça'ym syfrutyym*. Jerusalem, M.

their author, who, according to the *Talmud,* is precisely Ezra,[42] also wrote these verses of *Deuteronomy* III, 13-14. The *Radaq* (R. David Qimhy, 1160-1235) emphasizes that this account of *the Chronicles* only specifies the genealogy of Jair which is mentioned in *Deuteronomy*.[43] The translators of the *TTP* have noted that these last remarks, which Spinoza refers to R. Ibn Ezra, do not concern R. Ibn Ezra, but take up a thesis developed by Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676), whose work *Praeadamitae* Spinoza owned.[44]

Spinoza then gives four examples of textual problems, which he considered to be crucial to prove that Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*:[45]

1. The books of *Exodus*, *Leviticus* and *Numbers* not only speak of "Moses in the third person, but they also give many testimonies about him" (*Mose non tantum in tertia persona loquatur, sed quod insuper de eo multa testetur*), while in *Deuteronomy* "Moses speaks and relates his deeds in the first person" (*loquitur suaque facta narrat Moses in prima persona*). For Spinoza, "All this - a way of speaking, an external testimony, the very context of the whole of history fully persuades us that these books were written not by Moses, but by someone else" (*Quae omnia, nempe modus loquendi, testimonia, et ipse totius historiae contextus plane suadent hos libros ab alio, non ab ipso Mose fuisse conscriptos*).

2. The end of *Deuteronomy* affirms that "No prophet, equal to Moses, ever arose in Israel who knew God face to face." This comparison made with all the other prophets who lived after him, cannot be of Moses himself, for 'Moses ... could not give it himself, nor one of his immediate successors: he is one who lived many centuries later (*Quod sane testimonium non Moses ipsus de se, nec alius, qui eum immediate secutus est, sed aliquis, qui multis post saeculis vixi*). Indeed, the affirmation of *Deuteronomy* involves a much later narrator who, logically, lived at least at the time of the last three prophets of the beginning of the Second Temple, who were precisely contemporaries of Ezra.

3. Some places are not called by the names that were not then in use at the time of Moses, but they refer to later names. Thus, the text of *Genesis* 14:14 tells us that Abraham pursued his enemies as far as *Dan*, "whereas that city did not receive that name until long after the death of Joshua" (*haec urbs non obtinuit, nisi longe post mortem Joshua*), as recorded in the book of *Judges* 18:29.

4. The narratives sometimes relate to post-mosaic events. In this way, the verse of *Exodus* 16:35 tells us that the Children of Israel ate manna

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Bialik, 2000

[42] *Bab'a Batr'a* 15a, cf. Nahmanides, Sefer Ha-G'eulah. *Kitvey Ha-Ramban*, Jerusalem, M. ha-Rav Kook, II, 272.

[43] Radaq on *Chronicles* I, II, 22

[44] Jacqueline Lagrée, Pierre-François Moreau, *TTP* Translators, 741, note 17. Cf. I. La Peyrère, *Præadamita.* Amsterdam, Louis & Daniel Elzevier, 1655, 186-187.

[45] Spinoza, *TTP*, VIII, 4, 332-335

for forty years, until they arrived in the territories that were then inhabited by Canaan. As this location is described in the book of *Joshua* 5:12, it was therefore not available in Moses' day. Spinoza points out the same difficulty regarding the verse of *Genesis* 36:31, "And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the Children of Israel.*"* "Undoubtedly, the historian here relates that the Idumeans had kings before David subdued them and established garrisons in Idumea" (*Narrat sine dubio ibi historicus, quos reges Idumaei habuerint, antequam David eos subegit et praesides in ipsa Idumaea constituit*). Now, since these are the Idumean kings whom David defeated, as it is related in II *Samuel,* 8:14, and therefore Moses could not have been the author of this verse.

From the exposition of these textual difficulties, Spinoza concludes that the entire *Pentateuch* was not written by Moses, but by another author much later. It should be noted that the four arguments are not homogeneous: the first two are narrative, while the last note an editorial anachronism.

Concerning the first two examples, let us remember that Spinoza took from R. Ibn Ezra his method of contextual hermeneutics.[46] Apparently based on the super-commentary *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, he pointed out a distinction between what Frege would call direct speech and reported speech.[47] Wishing to prove that the biblical narrator was not always Moses, Spinoza goes far beyond this distinction of narratological order, but he slips without transition from the question of the narrator to that of the biblical author, then to that of the Divine Speaker, and he ends up concluding that the biblical text cannot be of divine origin. Now, this conclusion proceeds from the fact that he sees a contradiction between the extensional procedures of Moses' direct discourse in *Deuteronomy*, as *oratio recta*, and the intensional procedures of the reported discourse as *oratio obliqua*, presented by Moses in the second, third, and fourth books of the *Pentateuch*. I will return later on the importance of this semantic distinction.

The third difficult example noted by Spinoza concerns the anachronism of the evocation of toponyms such as that of Dan. Let us recall that the *Talmud Sanhedryn* 96a had already considered this question, and it had then specified that Dan is mentioned because Abraham received a prophetic vision there, indicating to him that his descendants would practice idolatry there, as it is related in the book of I *Kings* 12:29. On the

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[46] Amos Funkenstein, Comment on Richard Popkin's Paper. In The Books of Nature and Scripture. *International Archives of the History of Ideas*. 139, 1994, 21

[47] Gottlob Frege, On sense and reference. English translation, reprinted in Adrian W. Moore (Ed.) *Meaning and Reference*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, 23-42; Paula Gherasin, Expression linguistique de la subjectivité dans le discours et le discours rapporté. *Cahiers de Linguistique Française*. 25, 2003, 208.

other hand, another version of R. Ibn Ezra states that in this verse the term Dan refers to a different place (*'eyn zu shem Dan ha-yadu'a 'el'a 'aheret*) than the one that will be known and mentioned in the time of the *Kings*, while the standard edition of R. Ibn Ezra does not comment on this problem of anachronism at all.[48]

The fourth difficult example, which does not refer to the verse *of Exodus* 16:34, to which Spinoza mistakenly refers, but to the next verse, apparently concerns the post-Mosaic period during which the Children of Israel, having arrived at the border of the territory of Canaan, then ceased to eat manna. According to commentators, this verse prophetically describes the history of this meta-natural food that was available for forty years. As Rashi *ad locum* explains, the manna stopped falling on the day of Moses' death, so he had still witnessed this last miracle, which occurred on the 7th of the month of Adar. However, its abundance was such that it was sufficient for the subsistence of the People for more than five weeks, until the 16th of the month of Nysan.

As for the question of the kings of Edom who reigned before there was a king in Israel (*Genesis,* 36: 31), mention should be made of the diatribes of R. Ibn Ezra against a certain Itshaqy who suggested, in a pre-spinozist style, that this verse was written only in the time of Jehoshafat. R. Ibn Ezra then specified that his book "deserves to be burned" (*r'auy lehisaref*).[49] He emphasizes that the first king in Israel was Moses, because, as Nahmanides (R. Mosheh ben Nahman, 1194-1270) noted, the Idumean kings had ceased to reign in his time, without there being any need to place them in the distant future.[50] As a result, R. Ibn Ezra would certainly have disavowed Spinoza's use of his writings, as well as Spinoza's reduction of

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[48] Cf. Gershon Brin, She'elot hybur we-'arykah be-Miqr'a beperusho shel R.Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a. *Te'udah*, VIII, 1992, 127. Regarding his remark on the toponym Dan, Spinoza may have been influenced by the comment of R. Shim'on ben Tsemah Duran, who hypothesized a late interpolation. Cf. Abraham Joshua Heshel, *Torah min ha-Shamaym beaspeqlari'a shel ha-dorot*. London, New York, Soncino Press, 1965, 393

[49] Various opinions have been expressed regarding the identity of this author. The *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, 11 thinks that this is R. Ytshaq ben Yeshush. On the contrary, R. Yaacov Rifman emphasizes that it must be a surname and not a first name, *Toldot 'Avi Mishpahat Rapaport*. Vienna, 1872, 13. Uriel Simon, after having reported several theses, leans towards R. Jonah Ibn Janah, Who was the Proponent of Lexical Substitution Whom Ibn Ezra Denounced as a Prater and a Madman? In *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, Barry Walfish (Ed.) Vol.1, Haifa, Haifa University Press, 1993, 217-232. It should also be noted that according to the *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*, 31, R. Ibn Ezra's criticism of Itshaqy cannot be applied to his own commentaries since Itshaqy's remark concerns an entire section, "parashah shlemah," while R. Ibn Ezra's remarks do not refer to verses which, even if moved, do not change their meaning. Uriel Simon emphasizes the difficulties of such a distinction, 'Ozen Myln Tivhan. *Mehqarym bedarko ha-parshanyt shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2013, 293-294.

[50] R. Ibn Ezra and Nahmanides on *Genesis* 36: 31. *Midrash Rabah, B'ereshyt*, XLIII.

the Biblical text to a purely human editorial history. Nevertheless, the Spinozist interpretation of the writings of R. Ibn Ezra played a crucial role in the development of deistic thought as well as in the elaboration of the foundations of biblical criticism.[51]

Spinoza and the Hermeneutics of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

R. Ibn Ezra's interpretations are often non-literal,[52] and the ambiguities they entail have strongly influenced Spinoza's critical reading of the *Pentateuch*, apparently based on several super-commentaries that Spinoza seems to have consulted. However, in 1671, one year after the publication of the *TTP*, Johannes Melchior (1646-1689) sought to refute, apparently based on some super-commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, the six theses that Spinoza attributed to him.[53] And in 1678, a year after Spinoza's death, Richard Simon (1638-1712), while postulating that parts of the *Pentateuch* were written after Moses, and in particular by Ezra, has also criticized Spinoza's use of R. Ibn Ezra's commentary. He pointed out that the Spinozist interpretation of this commentary "only proves that some additions have been inferred to the ancient acts, which cannot be denied to be by Moses, or at least to have been written in his time and by his order... he is manifestly mistaken, in that he believed that passages in *Deuteronomy* and the book of *Joshua* ... mentions the whole Law of Moses."[54] Similarly, two years after Spinoza's death, his interpretation of R. Ibn Ezra was challenged point by point by Pierre Daniel Huet. He also criticized the approaches of Isaac Lapeyrère and Thomas Hobbes questioning the authorship of Moses on certain biblical passages, as well as Elias Levitas on the late character of Hebrew vowels.[55] For R. Solomon Zalman Netter (1801-1879), all the verses whose Mosaic authorship has been disputed on the basis of certain commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, were prophetically

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[51] Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. 25

[52] H. Norman Strickman, Abraham ibn Ezra's Non-Literal Interpretations. *Hakirah*. 9, 2010, 281-296

[53] J. Melchioris, *Epistola ad amicum, continens censuram libri, cui titulus: Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Utrecht, Cornelius Noenaert, 1671, 35-36. On the importance of Spinoza's criticism by Johannes Melchior and its repercussions on the Dutch Reformed theologians, cf. Albert Gootjes, The First Orchestrated Attack on Spinoza: Johannes Melchioris and the Cartesian Network in Utrecht. *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 79, 1, 2018, 23-43.

[54] R. Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*. Reproduction of the New Edition published in Rotterdam in 1685. Frankfurt, Minerva, G.M.B.H. 1967, Preface, without pagination.

[55] Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Demonstratio Evangelica*. Paris, 1679, 141-142. Huet had met R. Menasheh ben Israel in 1652 in Amsterdam. Cf. A. G. Shelford, Thinking Geometrically in Pierre-Daniel Huet's "Demonstratio evangelica" (1679). *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 63, 4, 2002, 601.

enunciated. [56] And according to Michael Friedlander (1833-1910), R. Ibn Ezra adheres entirely to the tradition, positing that Moses was indeed the author of the *Pentateuch*.[57]

Spinoza's reading of R. Ibn Ezra has thus been described as highly "ironic," insofar as the main concern of this author was first of all to unveil the real harmony between the written law and the oral law, in order to preserve the unity of the Jewish Tradition and to defend it against any kind of historical or textual dispute.[58] In this sense, the use of the oral Law as a hermeneutical complement to the written Law remained fundamental for R. Ibn Ezra, since he specifies that "the Oral Torah is the explanation of the Written Torah" (*Torah shebe-'al peh sheu' perush ha-Torah shebe-ktav*).[59] It aimed first of all to develop a biblical hermeneutic capable of criticizing the Christian and Karaite interpretations that similarly rejected the oral law.[60] Now, Spinoza could not transgress the two principles they had laid for the study of the Bible: first, "to treat only of what concerns Scripture alone" (*quae solam Scripturam spectant*),[61] that is, only of the written law; and second, to reject all rabbinic commentary, since the "rabbis are completely delusional" (*Rabini namque plane delirant*).[62]

It therefore seems completely paradoxical that Spinoza could rely on the authority of R. Ibn Ezra in order to contest the traditional Mosaic authorship of the *Pentateuch*, while R. Ibn Ezra did not cease to affirm his fidelity to the rabbinic tradition. Recall that Spinoza quotes R. Ibn Ezra's commentary on the verse of *Esther* 9:32, suggesting that this book has been lost (*we'avad ha-sefer*), in order to prove that this book, as well as those of *Daniel*, *Ezra*, and *Nehemiah*, were written by a "single historian" (*uno eodemque historico*), and therefore that Mordecai could not have been the author.[63] However, Spinoza fails to recall the *Introduction* of R. Ibn Ezra to the Book of *Esther*, where he explicitly wrote: "It seems to me correct to affirm (*nakon*

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[56] R. Shlomo Zalman Netter, Perush 'al Ibn Ezra on *Deuteronomy*, 1: 2 and on *Deuteronomy* 34:1. In *Hamyshah Humshey Torah,* Wien, 1859. It should be noted that according to Gad Freudenthal, this super-commentary by R. Ibn Ezra is not by R. Shlomo Zalman Netter, but it was written by R. Abraham Nager. Gad Freudenthal, Abraham Nager's Super-commentary on Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on Leviticus and its Erroneous Ascription to R. Salomon Netter (1859). *Alei Sefer*, 26/27, 2007, 265-276.

[57] Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 65-66

[58] Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. 25

[59] R. Ibn Ezra on *Exodus* 19:9

[60] Nahum M. Sarna, Abraham Ibn Ezra as an exegete. In Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Eds). *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*. Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1993, 5

[61] Spinoza, *TTP,* I, 5, 82-83

[62] Spinoza, *TTP*, IX, 11, 366-367

[63] Spinoza, *TTP*, X, 10, 394-395; R. Ibn Ezra on *Esther* 9: 32

be'eynay) that this scroll was written by Mordecai."[64] Similarly, Spinoza refers to R. Ibn Ezra, suggesting that the verse in *Genesis* 35:2 reporting Jacob's instructions to keep away foreign gods, implies that Jacob was previously a polytheist. However, R. Ibn Ezra explicitly rejects such a hypothesis: "God forbids" (*halylah, halylah*).[65]

It should be noted that if the interpretations of R. Ibn Ezra sometimes differ from those of the *Talmud*, it is only in the case where the *Talmud* puts forward ideas that do not proceed from Tradition itself, but from personal opinions interpolated in the homelic narratives (*'agadot*).[66] According to R. Ibn Ezra, these opinions can be criticized only on the condition that the new interpretation does not contradict the rabbinic legislation (*halakah*) which can never be questioned.[67] Similarly, he recognizes the importance of the Masoretes, described as "Guardians of the Temple walls" (*Shomrey Humot ha-Miqdash*), who were able to preserve the scriptural tradition.[68]

It should be noted that the hermeneutics of R. Ibn Ezra innovated by introducing into his biblical commentary a considerable amount of scientific elements. It refers to astrological (*hokmat ha-mazalot*), geometrical (*hokmat ha-midot*), astronomical (*toledet ha-shamayym*), psychological (*hokmat*

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[64] R. Ibn Ezra, Introduction to the Commentary on *Esther* I, 1; David Lemler, Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive. *Revue des Etudes Juives.* 168, 3-4, 2009, 439.

[65] Spinoza, *TTP*; II, 14, 136-137; R. Abraham Ibn Ezra on *Genesis* 35:2 and on *Deuteronomy* 31:16, Waren Zev Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve." 41, note 3.

[66] On this point, it should be remembered that R. Shlomo Luria (1510-1573) sharply criticized R. Ibn Ezra, pointing out that, not being himself a true Talmudist, he opposed the Sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*, according to the criteria proper to his understanding alone. The fact that his sometimes-disconnected understanding of tradition may have strengthened the opinions of heretics, Sadducees, and those with some weaknesses in religious matters (*qaley e'munah*). R. Shlomo Luria, Yam shel Shlomo, Maseket Hulyn, Haqdamah R'ishonah. Offenbach, 1718, 3. R. S. Luria's criticism was taken up by R. Moshe Isserles (1520-1572). On the different perceptions of R. Ibn Ezra by the rabbinical authorities, cf. R. Z. L'ahra'ar, Ha-'Eben 'Ezr'a be-'eyney gedoley ha-dorot. *Tsfonot.* 3, 1989, 80-86. However, Maimonides spoke of R. Ibn Ezra in very complimentary terms. Thus, he wrote to his son, R. Abraham, that R. Ibn Ezra, in his commentary on the *Pentateuch*, has unveiled profound secrets that only those who are at his level are really able to understand. Musar n'aeh me'od miHa-Rambam z'l. 'Iygrot Ha-Rambam. In *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam we-'Iygrotyav*. Heleq Sheny, Leipzig 1859, 9. The thesis of R. Ibn Erza's opposition to the rabbis of the Talmud has been nuanced by A. Cohen, Raby Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a : Ha-'umnam benygud le-Hazal? *Qulmus*, 2005, 27, 87-97.

[67] R. Ibn Ezra on *Genesis* XXII, 4; cf. H. Norman Strickman, Abraham Ibn Ezra's Non-Literal Interpretations. *Hakirah,* 9, 2010, 281-282.

[68] R. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer Me'oznaym*. Offenbach, 1791, 1. In his work *Yesod Mor'a we-sod Torah*, R. Ibn Ezra uses the expression "guardians of the city walls" (*shomrey humot ha-'Iyr*). R. A. Ibn Ezra, Y. Cohen, U. Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a we-sod Torah*. 67.

ha-nefesh), rhetorical knowledge (*ḥokmat ha-miwṭ'a*),[69] while resorting to Aristotelian philosophy.[70] Thus, the influence that R. Ibn Ezra may have had on the sages of his generation in many areas[71] actually contradicts the cleavage posed by Spinoza between Reason and Revelation, because for the author of the *TTP* : "Theology is not the handmaid of reason, nor reason that of theology" (*Nec theologiam rationi, nec rationem theologiae ancillari ostenditur*).[72] At the same time, this recourse to external elements posited by R. Ibn Ezra as necessary for biblical hermeneutics is in opposition to the Spinozist principle of "scriptura sola,"[73] requesting that we remain solely reliant on Scripture.

R. Ibn Ezra's commentaries have raised serious questions among his readers, especially those dealing with the last twelve verses of *Deuteronomy* (34:1-34:12).[74] Before him, the *Talmud* expressed two opinions concerning the author of the last eight verses. The first states that this writing was posthumous, and it was carried out by Joshua under divine dictation,[75] while the second opinion specifies that these verses were indeed written by Moses, but with his "tears" (*bedim'a*), also under divine dictation.[76] In this sense, R. Shmuel Tsarçah specifies that R. Ibn Ezra, while recalling that Joshua had written the last verses of the *Pentateuch*, in fact did not adhere to this thesis (*'eyno sover zeh*), but that he really thought that these verses were said to Moses by prophecy (*ne'emru le-Mosheh bederek nevu'ah*), who then wrote them also by prophecy (*katav benevu'ah*).[77] In any case, as R. Shmuel Motot (late 14th century) points out, R. Ibn Ezra suggests that, in accordance with the traditional reading, Moses addresses himself by

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[69] R. Ibn Ezra, Yoseph Cohen, Uriel Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a we-sod Torah*. 80; Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*. Leiden, Brill, 2003, 257-258.

[70] Mariano Gómez Aranda, Aristotelian Theories in Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentaries to the Bible.Mediterranea: *International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*. 3, 2018, 35-54

[71] R. Yehuda Masqony, Haqdamah le-'Eben ha-'Ezer. In A. Berliner, D. Hoffmann (Eds.), *'Oçar tov*. Berlin, 1878, 3

[72] Spinoza, *TTP*, XIV, 1, 482-483; J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 4. Commentators have disagreed on whether the *TTP* sought to expound a radically atheistic thesis or to develop an unorthodox theology through dual teaching. For a summary of the various theses, see Steven Frankel, Spinoza's dual teaching of Scripture: His Solution to the Quarrel between Religion and. Revelation. *Archiv für Geshichte der Philosophie*. 84, 2002, 274-275.

[73] Spinoza, *TTP*, I, 6, 81-82

[74] Aaron Mondschein, "Yesh lo sod we-hamaskyl ydom": Misygnono ha-'enygmaty shel Ha-Rav 'Eben 'Ezr'a 'ad ha-'arakat 'iyshyuto. *Shenaton leheqer ha-Miqr'a we-ha-Mizrah ha-Qadum*. XIV, 2004, 257-288; cf. Yehuda. L. Pel Ish'ar, Perushym leperush R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a laMiqr'a. *'Oçar ha-Hayym*, 10-11, 1935, 176-177.

[75] *Bab'a Batr'a* 14b

[76] *Bab'a Batr'a* 15a

[77] R. Shmuel Tsarçah, *Meqor Hayym*. In R. Yequty'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (ed.), *Sefer Margalyot Tovah*, 134b

prophecy to future generations, without ever insinuating, as suggested by the author of the *Tsafnat Pa'eneaḥ* (while noting that they were dictated by prophecy), and Spinoza after him (but without mentioning such a precision), that Moses was not the author of these verses.[78]

However, Yehuda Leib Krinsky (19th century) specifies that the thesis of the late addition of these passages is based on a pure misunderstanding of their literal meaning. To legitimize such a thesis, it would first be necessary to understand the true intention of these authors to make such additions, and then the purpose for which they undertook to correct the text of the *Pentateuch*, thus considered to be originally "defective." In spite of all the obscure allusions of R. Ibn Ezra, it is impossible to postulate, as Spinoza does, that according to R. Ibn Ezra thought Moses was not himself the author of the *Pentateuch*. He only suggested that some verses were not transcribed by Moses, but never claimed that they could not have a divine origin.[79] In this sense, he did not adopt the theory of an interpolation of verses, or even the possibility of a late alteration, even if he attributes the writing of the last verses of the *Pentateuch* to Joshua, under divine dictation.[80] R. Ibn Ezra himself rejected the hypothesis that some verses may have been written after the Mosaic writing. As I mentioned earlier, in his commentary on *Genesis* 36:31, he objects to the explanation of a certain Yishaqy who reported the writing of the verse concerning the kings of Edom in the time of Jehoshaphat. It should be remembered that the Sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* mentioned several versions of the *Pentateuch*, with minimal differences, despite all the precautions taken by the scribes regarding the transmission and copying of manuscripts. They recalled that three versions of the Torah had been found in the Court of the Second Temple and that the copies were then amended according to the majority of versions, while in the Ark of the First Temple was placed the scroll written by Moses himself, which was free of any error.[81] The secularist reasoning that Spinoza tried to find in R. Ibn Ezra is in fact a circular reasoning. It can be summarized in the following way: insofar as God is nature, there can be no other laws than the natural laws, thus excluding any idea of divine will and Sinaic Revelation, since the natural law is necessary while the biblical law remains contingent. Unlike the second law, the first cannot be annulled. In this sense, Adam and Eve could have transgressed the prohibition of eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they could not have transgressed the law of

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[78] R. Shmuel Motot, *Perush 'al perush. Megylat setarym*. Venice, 1554, 46a

[79] R. Yehuda L. Krinsky, *Mehoqeqey Yehuda 'al Devarym, Qarney 'Or*. Vilna, 1928, 2a ,

[80] Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the writing of Ibn Ezra*, 62-65

[81] *Mishnah Soferym* VI, 4, mentioned by Spinoza in the *TTP*, IX, 20, 380-381; Talmud Yerushalmy, *Ta'anyt* IV, 2, 68a.

the falling bodies.[82] Spinoza, in denying Jewish tradition, could not believe that the Torah was written in a meta-natural way, and that it was therefore also able to describe future events.

Historians such as Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), have taken up Spinoza's interpretation of Ibn Ezra, noting that "in dark and enigmatic meanders (*in dunkeln, rathselhaften Wendungen*)" R. Ibn Ezra has made it clear that some passages of the *Pentateuch* were not written by Moses, but were added late.[83] However, one may wonder, as R. Mordekay Breuer (1921-2007) does, how Spinoza could have distorted the words of R. Ibn Ezra to such an extent in order to defend his own theses, thus transforming an authentic Jewish thinker into a heretic.[84] Criticizing the position of Israel Knohl, who followed the Spinozist interpretation, R. Mordekay Breuer replies that such a view is in fact the result of a fundamental methodological error, which derives from the prejudicial idea that the Torah is a human work, thus allowing us to suppose that it was written by several people. This approach is based on arbitrary approaches which forge arbitrary methods of analysis, cut off from the traditional rules of interpretation. They can never contradict the Monotheist principle that the Torah proceeds from Revelation, and is "min ha-Shamaym," of divine origin, because it was God Himself, not Moses or any other prophet, who wrote it and then passed it on to them.[85] As Amos Funkenstein points out, nothing was as far removed from the thought of R. Ibn Ezra as the idea of questioning the authenticity and revealed character of Scripture. He developed a hermeneutical principle known as "accommodation," which made it possible to resolve a good number of scriptural difficulties; a principle that was misrepresented by Spinoza in order to base a secularized textual critique. This is why R. Ibn Ezra cannot appear as Spinoza's predecessor.[86] Spinoza's approach consisted in maintaining the traditional terms, while radically transforming their meaning. He thus retained the notions of general and providences, but he reduced them to two distinct modes of natural legislation.[87] He also seems to have understood literally the Talmudic remark that Scripture speaks the language of men (*dybrah Torah kelashon bney 'adam*), in support of

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[82] David Biale, *Not in the Heavens: The Secular Tradition of Jewish Secular Thought.* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010, 26

[83] Heinrich Graetz, Geschichte der Juden. Bd. VI.: *Vom Aufblühen der jüdisch-spanischen Kultur 1027 bis Maimunis Tod.* Leipzig, Leiner, Reedition, 1870, 207

[84] R. Mordekay Breuer, 'Emunah we-Mad'a beParshanut ha-Miqr'a. *De'ot.* 11, 1960, 18-24. Israel Knohl, Beyn 'Emunah lebyqoret. *Megadim*, 33, 2001, 123-126

[85] R Mordekay Breuer, 'Al Byqoret ha-Miqr'a. *Megadim,* 30, 1999, 97-101

[86] David Lemler, Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive. *Revue des Etudes Juives.* 168, 3-4, 2009, 456

[87] Spinoza, *Short Treatise*, I, V; Jacqueline Lagrée, La raison ardente. Natural Religion and Reason in the Seventeenth Century. Paris, Vrin, 1991, 195

his thesis that the author of the Bible is himself human.[88]

Commentators agree that Spinoza did not properly read the texts of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra. Thus, for example, Warren Zev Harvey points out that Spinoza "exaggerates" by asserting that, according to R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*, when he had only suggested that certain passages could have been written by Joshua.[89] According to Steven Nadler, R. Ibn Ezra never affirmed the denial of the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch.[90] Raphael Jospe notes that the questions asked by R. Ibn Ezra were not ideological in nature, seeking, for example, to determine who was really the author of the last verses of *Deuteronomy*, but they were geographical. Thus, R. Ibn Ezra asks: "Does a common name necessarily refer to a place in the Western land of Israel later known by the Jews, or can it also refer to some place the Israelites came across in eastern trans-Jordan prior to the conquest of the land."[91] In fact, as Uriel Simon points out, Spinoza did not grasp the true hermeneutical intention of R. Ibn Ezra, whose concern was above all to remain faithful to tradition and not to criticize it (*ne'emanutyt we-l'o byquratyt*). As a result, Spinoza tried to project onto the writings of R. Ibn Ezra his theoretical presuppositions that were foreign to him, thus remaining at odds with his commentaries.[92]

Spinoza and the super-commentaries on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra

Spinoza, posing as the only valid interpreter of R. Ibn Ezra, also considered himself as his continuator, and as a result he then described as scaffolding (*hariolari*) the traditional interpretations that differed from his own.[93] Although he directly studied the commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, he seems to have been mainly influenced by the super-commentaries on R. Ibn

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[88] Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton, New Jersey, 1986, 219-220; *Nedarym* 3a.

[89] Waren Z. Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve." In Y. Y. Melamed, M. A. Rosenthal (Eds), *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*. A Critical Guide, 41-55

[90] Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, 109

[91] Raphael Jospe, Biblical Exegesis as a Philosophic Literary Genre: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Moses Maimonides. In Emil L. Fackenheim & Raphael Jospe (Eds), *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy*. Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, 58. This remark seems to be able to qualify what has been called the "historical criticism" of R. Ibn Ezra, which would thus have influenced Spinoza's theses. N. Sarna, Abraham Ibn Ezra as an Exegete. In Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Eds). *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*. 17.

[92] Uriel Simon, *Dyuqan shel parshan – R.'Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 2021, 195

[93] Spinoza, *TTP* VIII, 3, 328-329, David Lemler, Abraham ibn Ezra et Moïse Maïmonide cités par Spinoza ou l'impossibilité d'une philosophie juive. *Revue des Etudes Juives*. 168, 3-4, 2009, 451

Ezra, which began to appear in the 13th and 14th centuries.[94] It is possible that the Spinozist thesis of the post-mosaic redaction of the *Pentateuch* was suggested to him by R. Eleazar ben Mortarthias, who wrote, in Byzantium between 1285 and 1295, a super-commentary on R. Ibn Ezra, affirming that Ezra was in fact the author of the *Pentateuch*. However, the thesis of R. Eleazar ben Mortarthias differs fundamentally from that of Spinoza, since he emphasizes the prophetic essence of Scripture.[95] Similarly, R. Shmuel Motot (second half of the 14th century) emphasizes that according to R. Ibn Ezra the 12 verses were dictated to Moses by prophecy.[96]

One of the sources that leads us to think R. Ibn Ezra affirmed the non-Mosaic authorship of certain verses of the *Pentateuch* concerns his commentary on *Leviticus* 16:8. He points out that the scapegoat (*s'eyr le-'Az'az'el*) that was brought on the Day of Atonement (*yom ha-kypurym*) was not a sacrifice, and its name itself contains a mystery (*sod*), and that there are others in Scripture (*yesh lo haverym be-Miqr'a*). He adds: "And I will reveal to you a part of this secret, by allusion, and you will know it when you have reached the age of thirty-three years (*we-'any 'egaleh leka qçat ha-sod beremez bihyotka ben shloshym we-shalosh ted'eno*). According to R. Ysh'ayah ben M'eyr (13th and 14th centuries), this figure refers to the thirty-three verses which, according to R. Ibn Ezra, were not written by Moses.[97] In this sense, Spinoza was also able to consult the super-commentary of R. Shlomo Ibn Yaish of Guadalajara (13th century), affirming that according to R. Ibn Ezra thirty-three verses could not reasonably have been written by Moses.[98] However, Nahmanides, who never failed to criticize R. Ibn Ezra when he seemed to deviate from traditional hermeneutics, does not speak of non-Mosaic verses. He proposes to reveal the secret that R. Ibn Ezra deliberately "hid" (*mekaseh davar*), claiming that the expression 33 years refers to some other 33 verses: the distance between the first mention of Azazel in *Leviticus*

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[94] Cf. Dov Schwartz, Ledarkey ha-parshanut ha-fylosofyt 'al perushey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a. *'Aley Sefer*, 18, 1996, 71-109. Tamas Visi points out that almost all of these super-commentaries were written by Maimonidean philosophers. T. Visi, *Ibn Ezra, a Maimonidean Authority: The Evidence of the Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries*. In James T. Robinson (Ed.), The cultures of Maimonideanism: new approaches to the history of Jewish thought. Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2009,101.

[95] Warren Z. Harvey, Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's "secret of the twelve". In *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatrise. A Critical Guide.* Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Michael A. Rosenthal (Eds), 47, 52-53

[96] R. Shmuel Motot, In R. Yequty'el Lazy 'Ashekenazy (Ed.), *Sefer Margalyot Tovah*. 136b.

[97] A. Ysh'ayah ben M'eyr. In H. Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishah qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a.* 612

[98] Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History.* Ph.D. Dissertation Budapest, Central European University, 2006, 282, note 634. The author quotes the manuscript of R. Shlomo Ibn Yaish, note 637.

16: 8 and the mention of the sacrifices unto the he-goats in *Leviticus* 17:7.[99] R. Yehuda Mosqony gives another explanation of the interpretation of R. Ibn Ezra. According to him, these are the 33 sin offerings of goats (*ḥaṭ'aot s'eyrym*) that were brought to the Temple each year.[100] Uriel Simon reports other super-commentaries living in the 13th and 14th centuries, such as R. Ysh'ayah of Trany, R. Eliyahu of Sharash, R. Shlomo Franco, R. Ezra Gatinio and R. Shimshon Qyno of Marseille. They insisted, in particular, on R. Ibn Ezra's enigmatic commentary on *Leviticus* 16: 8, which, with regard to the term "Azazel." Some have suggested that this is a geographical anachronism (it would be the future name of a mountain) and a philological anachronism (this term would be of Aramaic origin, and therefore later).[101] Simon points out that the 'sacred' character of the Biblical text is not affected by the observation of certain anachronisms. Its prophetic status remains intact, and these anachronisms must be reported to Moses' pre-science regarding future events and referred to the readers of each generation whom the text also addresses. (*'al shem sofo*).[102]

Spinoza seems to follow the interpretations of R. Yoseph ben 'Ely'ezer 'Alam ha- ha-Sfarady, but he does not retain his conclusions, since this author emphasizes that all the additions to the *Pentateuch*, as suggested by R. Ibn Ezra, were of a prophetic nature and therefore did not contradict their divine character. He clarifies that because we believe in tradition (*divrey qabalah*), it does not matter if it was Moses or later prophets who wrote these verses. Their words are also true and proceed from prophecy alone. According to R. Ibn Ezra, if the verse of *Deuteronomy* 4:2 forbade adding to the divine prescriptions (*the o tosyfu*), this prohibition relates only to the commandments (*raq 'al ha-miçwot*),[103] and not to words, descriptive or merely informative expressions. The prophets were mainly concerned with the

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[99] Naḥmanides, Perush 'al Wayqr'a 16:8. *Kitvey ha-Ramban* II. Jerusalem, M. Ha-Rav Kook, 1960, 88. Concerning the relations of Naḥmanides to R. Ibn Ezra, cf. Myriam Seqelraç, Darko shel ha-Ramban be'iymuç divrey R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a we-hav'atam shel'o beshem 'omrym. *Shenaton leḥeker ha-Miqr'a weha-Mizraḥ ha-qadum*. XXIV, 2016, 285-302.

[100] R. Yehuda Mosqony, 'Even ha-'Ezer. In H. Kreisel (Ed.), *'Even ha-'Ezer*, Ben Gurion University, Makon Bialik, 2021, III, 131

[101] Uriel Simon, R. 'Eben 'Ezr'a- Hamefaresh shehayah lemefurash. Toldot ktyvat perushym leperushav mer'eshyt we-'ad teḥylat ha-m'eah ha-ḥamesh 'esreh. Ha-Miqr'a ber'ey mefarshav. *Sefer Zykaron le-Sarah Kamin*. Jerusalem, Magnes, 1994, 386-402. It should be noted that the text of R. Yehuda Ibn Mosqony of Bulgaria, written in 1362, notes that the first super-commentary of R. Ibn Ezra was written by R. Abishai of Sagori, also from Bulgaria, written in 1170, six years after the death of R. Ibn Ezra. In the 14th century, R. Joseph Ibn Caspi, followed by a dozen other authors, renewed the genre of the super-commentary in order to reconcile astrology, Maimonidean philosophy and Kabbalah. Cf. Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible.Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*. 23.

[102] Uriel Simon, '*Ozen Milyn Tibḥan. Meḥqarym bedarko ha-parshanyt shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*. Ramat Gan, Bar-Ilan University, 2013, 412

[103] R. Ibn Ezra, '*Al Ber'eshyt. Shyṭah 'aḥeret, dyqduq*. 12: 4.

meanings (*ha-ta'amym*) related to the commandments and not to the words (*ha-mylot*).[104] Therefore, if a prophet may have added one or more words to the message he has received in order to explain what has been conveyed to him by this prophecy, this is not an addition. This is why the 70 Sages, who translated the *Pentateuch* into Greek (the Septuagint), were allowed to change 13 things, as explained in the *Mishnah Sofrym* I, 9 and the *Talmud Megylah* 40a.[105]

      Despite these clarifications, according to R. Abraham Epstein (1841-1918), the author of the *Tsafnat Pa'eneah* not only influenced the writing of the *TTP*, but he would have already prefigured the Spinozist conception of the divine as purely natural (*'Elohey ha-tev'a*). He posited that human happiness consists in acting according to the intellect, from the fact that it can know the laws of nature (*'al py ha-sekel shehikyr 'et huqey ha-tev'a*).[106] Tamas Visi noted that R. Eleazar ben Mattityah, one of the super-commentators of R. Ibn Ezra of the 13th century, also foreshadows Spinoza, underlining that Ezra, who is said to have censored passages of the *Pentateuch* that might seem problematic for the people, must be considered as its main editor whom he qualifies as a copyist (*ma'atyq*)[107]. It should be noted that if R. 'Ele'azar ben Matityah seems to express some of Spinozist thesis, his conclusions are fundamentally different from those of the author of the *TTP*. He pointed out that Ezra was also a prophet, and therefore that the writing of the *Pentateuch* was well inspired.[108]

      For Spinoza, the original intention of the author of the text remains totally limited to the obvious textual meaning, consequently what cannot be documented, immanently, by the text itself cannot be related to the author's intention either. On the contrary, for traditional commentators, meaning remains open to permanent decoding, involving the active participation of the reader. The mere fact that an allusive meaning is suggested by the text, and thus discovered by the reader, means that it was already intended by the

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[104] R. Ibn Ezra, Yoseph Cohen, Uriel Simon (Eds), *Yesod Mor'a we-sod Torah*, 84-85. Aran Viezel pointed out that for R. Ibn Ezra, in the *Pentateuch*, the meanings are divine, while the words were formulated by Moses. Eran Viezel, "Ha-taa'mym 'Elohyym we-« hamylot shel Mosheh: hashqafato shel R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a besh'elat helqo shel Mosheh beKetyvat ha-Torah, meqorotyah we-masqenotav. *Tarbyz*, 80, 3, 2012, 387-407

[105] R. Yoseph ben Eliezer 'Alam ha-Sfarady, *Tsafnat Pa'eneah*. 92

[106] R. Abraham Epstein, *Miqadmonyut Ha-Yehudym*. I. Wien, 1887, 133

[107] R. 'Ele'azar ben Matityah, on *Genesis* 12, In Hayym Kreisel (Ed.), *Hamishah qadmoney mefarshey R. Abraham 'Eben 'Ezr'a*, 122. It should be remembered that the thesis of the "reinvention" of the Law of Moses by Ezra was formulated for the first time by Porphyry (234-305). *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains*. Edited and translated with an introduction and epilogue by R. Joseph Hoffmann. New York, Prometheus Books, 1994, 99.

[108] Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History*. 289

author without there being any need to provide any other documentary proof.[109] The biblical text has a fundamental pragmatic aspect, which actualizes what Paul Ricoeur calls a "revealing and transforming" dimension.[110] However, Spinoza has completely neglected such a dimension, which remains crucial to grasp the narratological essence of the Bible, certainly because of the fact, underlined by Emmanuel Levinas, of a lack of training in Talmudic dialectics. Indeed, following the research of Abraham de Mordechai Vaz Dias & Willem Gerard van der Tak, showing that Spinoza was not included in the register of Jewish studies institutions in Amsterdam,[111] Levinas thought that he did not know the *Talmud*. He therefore had access only to a « bloodless » Biblical text, and then he remained unable to understand its true meaning.[112]

Narratological levels

The *Pentateuch* frequently utilizes the reported speech, by Moses, of the divine Speaker, without using, as Spinoza thought, the subjective structures of the narrator. In this sense, the *Talmud* emphasizes that Moses limited himself to writing the word of God.[113] Therefore, the transmission of the divine reference was, in the case of the Mosaic prophecy, entirely

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[109] Tamas Visi, *The Early Ibn Ezra Supercommentaries: A Chapter in Medieval Jewish Intellectual History.* 235

[110] Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit. 3.* Paris, Le Seuil, 1985, 229

[111] Abraham de Mordechai Vaz Dias & Willem Gerard van der Tak, *Spinoza merchant & autodidact. Charter and other authentic documents relating to the philosopher's youth and his relations.* English translation in *Studia Rosenthaliana.* 16, 2, 1982, 153

[112] Emmanuel Levinas, Avez-vous relu Baruch? In *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme.* Paris, Albin Michel, 1976, 167, note 1. Let us specify that all of Spinoza's references to the *Talmud* concern only his homilies (*'agadot*) and not its dialectical logic, of which Levinas pointed out precisely the absence. Abraham Wolf had specified that it was unlikely that Spinoza had seriously studied the *Talmud*. Abraham Wolf, *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza.* London, G.Allen & Ulwil LTD, 1927, 143. Paul Vulliaud noted that Spinoza did not possess a copy of the *Talmud*, nor of his « abstract composed by Maimonides. » Paul Vulliaud, *Spinoza d'après les livres de sa bibliothèque.* Reedition, Paris, Éditions des Malassis, 2012, 33. On Spinoza's disinterest in the *Talmud*, cf. Mino Chamla, *Spinoza e il concetto della 'tradizione ebraica'.* Milano, F.Angeli, 1996, 127.

[113] *Bab'a Batr'a* 14b. However, Rashbam (R. Shmuel ben Meir 1080-1160), grandson of Rashi and contemporary of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, suggests a narratological distinction between the divine word addressed to Moses at Sinai and the writing of the *Pentateuch*. Thus, the whole account of the six days of creation (*mel'eket shishah yamym*) constitutes an explanation given by Moses, in order to introduce to the fourth article of the Decalogue (*Exodus* 20:7), prescribing to remember the day of *Shabbat* (Rashbam on *Genesis* I:1). In this sense, Rashbam distinguishes between the direct discourse of God and the comments of Moses, who then come to explain to the reader the direct divine discourse. Cf. Eran Viezel, Da'ato shel Rashbam beshe'elat ḥelqo shel Moshe bektyvat ha-Torah. *Shenaton leḥeker ha-Miqr'a weha-Mizraḥ ha-qadum.* XXII, 2013, 170-171

transparent, whereas for the other prophets it remained opaque. The *Midrash* underlines that before transmitting his prophecy to the Children of Israel, Moses specified: "This is the word (*zeh ha-davar*) of the Tetragrammaton," while the other prophets began the report of their prophecy with: "Thus spoke (*ko 'amar*) the Tetragrammaton." In the first case, the divine Presence spoke directly through the mouth of Moses, while in the second case, the prophets reported the divine message through their perceptual-intellectual structures.[114]

From a semantic point of view, it could be said that Moses transmitted his prophecy in a direct and consequently extensional way, whereas the other prophets stated their prophecy in an indirect style which, according to Gottlob Frege, denotes a thought and not a proposition.[115] It is therefore always accompanied by a referential opacity of an intensional nature.[116] The Mosaic prophecy was therefore based on a propositional transparency, where a reported sentence denotes exactly the words of the divine Speaker. It operated according to a discourse that Franz Brentano defined as the right mode (*modus rectus*), whereas the prophecy of the other prophets expressed a propositional opacity, due to a mediation of the words of the divine message through the subjective structures of the prophetic narrator. This last form of prophecy thus belonged to what Brentano called an oblique mode (*modus obliquus*).[117] However, as Hector-Neri *Castañeda* points out, a term appearing in an oblique construction retains its transparency if it reveals exactly the propositional content of the speaker to whom the narrator is directly referring,[118] which was precisely the case with all the prophets of Israel, despite their difference in style.[119]

The account of the event of the *burning bush* is one example among others of what Oswald Ducrot calls "polyphonic authority."[120] This is described through an embedding of discourses related to the direct style, which combines that of the Speaker (the Tetragrammaton), the narrator (Moses) and that of the alleged recipients of the narrator, i.e. the future protagonists (the Children of Israel and Pharaoh). Also reported is the content of the messages that the narrator Moses – who at first refused his mission, and therefore to be the protagonist – must transmit to the

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[114] Sifry on *Numbers* XXX, 2.

[115] Gottlob Frege, On sense and reference. English translation reprinted in Adrian W. Moore (Ed.) *Meaning and Reference,* 30

[116] Cf. Gennaro Chierchia, Intensionality and context change. *Journal of Logic, Language and Information.* 3, 2, 1994, 141-168

[117] Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. English translation, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, 345

[118] Héctor-Neri *Castañeda*, *Thinking, language and Experience*. Minneapolis, University of Minessota Press, 1989, 88

[119] *Sanhedryn* 89a

[120] Oswald Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit*. Paris, Ed. de Minuit, 1984, 169

protagonist recipients, in the name of the Speaker.[121]

In general, changes in the narrative voice cause breaks in the continuity of the narrative. Thus the chief cupbearer tells Pharaoh the story of Joseph's interpretation of his dream, using a *mise en abyme* of a narrative within the narrative, or metadiegetic narrative (that is a part of a story world which is depicted by one of the characters of the primary narrative).[122] On the other hand, the narrator can become an autonymic commentator himself, producing a discourse quoted from a quotation, as in the verse of *Joshua* VII, 26, affirming that the toponym "'Emeq Achor" will still exist at the time the reader will read this story.[123] Spinoza tried to transform the real narrative into a fictional narrative, in which the narrator, posed as imaginary, is asked by the real author (Ezra) in order to re-create a fictional narration. However, Spinoza did not pay attention to the fact that the text embeds different narrative levels, a fact that R. Ibn Ezra had nevertheless emphasized. Moreover, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer points out, the questioning of historical propositions, which are always indirect representations, requires that they be evaluated first according to their truth value, rather than according to their fictional appearance.[124]

The narrator- narratory distinction and the semantic difficulties of the TTP

The *Pentateuch* presents stratified narrative levels, the semantic complexity of which must be understood. Historical criticism, promoted by Spinoza, by separating the text from its rational approach and truth, actually provoked what has been called "The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative," which led to a split between the narrative's apparent reference and its historical significance.[125] This is why Spinoza, who did not grasp the importance of the narrative stratification of the Biblical text, in fact misunderstood its unitary narrative polyphony, and consequently posited the multiplicity of its authors.

It should be emphasized that Biblical narration is fundamentally different from other literatures of Antiquity, because of its oral and

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[121] *Exodus*, III, 10-22; Moses Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus* 1-11. Second Ed. Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2013, 81-85

[122] Gérard Genette, *Figures III.* Paris, le Seuil, 1972, 239

[123] Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and structure in Biblical Hebrew narrative.* Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2001 125 and 140; *Targum Jonathan* and *Mezudath David* on *Joshua* VII, 26. According to Rudolf Carnap, a autonymic expression refers, in the context of a sentence, to a symbol which is used as the name of itself Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language.* English translation, London, Kegan Paul, 17.

[124] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Quelles vérités pour quelles fictions? *L'homme*, 175-176, 2005, 27

[125] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974, 44

historical dimension.[126] If it proceeds from a transfer from the oral to the written or from the epic to the narrative, Moses and then Ezra decreed that the text should be oralized in order to read it publicly, four times a week, part of the weekly pericope, which is itself read in its entirety on *Shabbat* morning.[127] This preservation of the oral dimension of the *Pentateuch,* which Moshe Idel qualifies as the *Voiced Text of the Torah*,[128] implies at the same time a relationship, of a pragmatic nature, with the listener. The *Midrash Yalquṯ Shim'eony* specifies that each reading of the Torah actually updates its donation to Mount Sinai, thus transforming the reader and the listener into real Biblical protagonists.[129] The addressee of the Biblical text, to whom the effects of reading are addressed, plays the role of what Rolland Barthes calls " narratory" (*narrataire*) that is to say, the one – reader or listener – to whom the narrator is addressing.[130] If, in literary narratives, the narrator and the narratory have only an intradiegetic textual existence, that is to say within the narrative inserted within the narrative,[131] the historical narrative of the Bible also gives them an extradiegetic status, that is to say, external to the narrative, aiming at the Children of Israel as real readers.

To understand the narrative status of Moses in *Deuteronomy*, we can appeal to notions established by Gérard Genette, who distinguishes between two types of narratives. The first is of a heterodiegetic order, where the narrator is absent from the story he is telling, as in the book of Genesis, while the second is of a homodiegetic order, where the narrator is present as a character in the story he is telling, as can be seen in the last four books of the *Pentateuch.* Concerning *Deuteronomy* particularly, Moses, as narrator, presents himself as *autodiegetic*, that is to say, as the main actor in the story and the narrator who is also the protagonist. The necessities of the presentation always require a description in a nested way of describing the relationships between the narrative act, its protagonists, its spatio-temporal determinations, as well as its relationship to the other narrative situations implied by the narrative.[132] I think that the narrative difficulties that R. Ibn Ezra has sought to highlight are part of what G. Genette, borrowing the term from Dumarsais, calls narrative metalepsis.[133] This is a process that

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[126] Robert S. Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rapsode.* Indiana University Press, 2004, 5, 161, 213

[127] *Bab'a qam'a* 82a

[128] Moshe Idel, The voiced text of the Torah. *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte.* 68, 1994, 145-166

[129] *Midrash Yalqut Shim'eony, Ytro*, 271

[130] Rolland Barthes, Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits. *Communications*, 8, 1966, 1-27

[131] Susan S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act.* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, 37

[132] Gérard Genette, *Figures* III, 233 and 252

[133] César C . Dumarsais, *Des Tropes ou Des differens sens dans qui on peut prendre un même mot dans une même langue.* Reprint, Paris, Delalain, 1816, 82

leads to a transgression of the boundary between two differentiated narrative levels, the first is that of the narrator of the story and the second is that of the reality described by the story. It is an intrusion of the extradiegetic narrator into the diegetic universe, that is to say, into the course of the narrated events.[134]

Thus, as Gershon Brin points out, R. Ibn Ezra considers Moses to be the editor (*'orek*) of the *Pentateuch*. For example, he emphasizes on the verse of *Genesis* 11:28, that the toponym "'Ur Kasdym" certainly had another name, since the name Kasdym will only be given later by the descendants of Nahor, Abraham's brother, but Moses retained it which was then known in his time.[135] Thus, it becomes possible to report the descriptions of the witnesses of the event to the Mosaic editor itself and not to another author.

Another distinction made by Gérard Genette can help us to understand the different temporal modalities at work in the *Pentateuch*. The chronology can be real, as in the books of *Joshua*, *Judges*, or *Samuel*, or well reported, as in the passages of the *Pentateuch* that I have underlined earlier. In this case, a distinction must be made between *analepsis*, which is a process by which the narrator recounts an event that occurred in the past after the fact has occurred, and *prolepsis*, by which the narrator anticipates future events.[136] Thus it can be understood that all the cases of anachronism noted by R. Ibn Ezra are prolepsis of a prophetic nature.

From a pragmatical perspective, the case of Moses' description of his own death constitutes what D. J. O'Connor has called a pragmatic paradox, which is a statement that is falsified by its own utterance, such as saying : "I am not speaking now," or "I am dead." In all cases, these are token-reflexive expressions, whose paradoxical character disappears when, for example, the personal pronouns "you" or "he" are substituted for "I." [137] R. Ibn Ezra's remarks cease to be problematic when they are related to prophetic dictation, which represents a higher narrative level, similar to that posed by Bertrand Russell's ramified theory of types, capable of avoiding

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[134] Gérard Genette, *Figures* III. 244-245

[135] Gershon Brin, She'elot hybur we-'arykah beMiqr'a beperusho shel R. 'Abraham 'Eben Ezr'a. *Te'udah*, VIII, 1992, 125-126. R. Jospe remarks that the expression used by R. Ibn Ezra, in connection with the verse of *Exodus* VI, 28 "the organizer of the sections" (*mesader ha-parashyot*), seems to indicate a late redaction, Biblical Exegesis as a Philosophical Literary Genre: Abraham Ibn Ezra and Moses Mendelssohn. In E. Fackenheim and R. Jospe (Eds). *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy*. 1996, 59. It may be objected, however, that the fact that R. Ibn Ezra recognizes Moses as the organizer of the sections of the *Pentateuch* in no way implies that this redaction, even if late, is not by Moses himself.

[136] Gérard Genette, *Figures* III. 89

[137] Daniel J. O'Connor, Pragmatic Paradoxes. *Mind*, 57, 1948, 358-359; Pragmatic Paradoxes and Fugitive Propositions. *Mind*. 60, 1951, 536-538.

logical paradoxes.[138] In this sense, the prophetic metalanguage, describing for example, in *Deuteronomy* 34:5-6 "And Moses died... Buried there" remains compatible with purely descriptive narrative forms. In this regard, Naḥmanides emphasized that Moses wrote the entire Torah under divine dictation, from the book of *Genesis* to the construction of the Tabernacle (*Exodus* 25:9-40), and he finished writing it at the end of the forty years of wandering in the desert.[139]

Talmud *Megylah* 7a notes that the biblical narrative is prophetic-historical is using the knowledge of the omniscient narrator, which is not shared by anyone else. For example, the book of *Esther* states, "Haman said in his heart," "Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her," or "And Mordecai knew what was happening." R. ibn Ezra sees in the verse of *Esther* 6: 6 evidence that this book was written prophetically, insofar as only the Creator can know the "secrets of the heart" (*ta'alumot lev*).

In fact, the narrative approach to the Biblical text requires a distinction between the historical *value* of the data, and the historiographic *force* of their representations. The first concerns the objective factuality of events, while the second is a socio-cultural and axiological judgment on the facts, and it can always vary according to the textual context.[140] Actually, if, as a narrative, the Biblical text does not represent a story but tells it, it signifies it by means of language without necessarily imitating the reality described.[141] The Bible has greatly developed the technique of points of view, always involving a relationship between subject and object, a perceiving mind and a perceived reality. It thus reflects its own hermeneutical constructions. There is always an incessant interaction between discourse, the world and the type of perspective involved, which together constitute the production of meaning,[142] and therefore divine authorship is not dogmatic, but only semantic. As a result, as Daniel Boyarin points out, all the difficulties that can be identified in the biblical text must then be read "as a central part of the system of meaning production of that text."[143]

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[138] Bertrand Russell, The Theory of Logical Types. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 18, 3, 1910, 288-289

[139] Naḥmanides, *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Torah*. Reedition, Jerusalem, M. ha-Rav Kook, 1959, I, 1

[140] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, 26

[141] Gerard Genette, *Nouvelle théorie du récit*. Paris, Seuil, 1983, 29

[142] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 129

[143] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990, 40. In a similar style, starting from the narrative, rabbinic exegesis aims to identify a multiplicity, even an infinity of connections and textual sub-units, each carrying a particular aspect of the hermeneutic content of the narrative. Cf. Hanna Liss, *Creating Fictional Worlds: Peshat-Exegesis and Narrativity in Rashbam's*

Conclusion

I have sought to clarify the nature of the relationships between R. Ibn Ezra and Spinoza, who considered himself to be his continuator and his only valid interpreter. This article has analyzed the theses that Spinoza attributed to R. Ibn Ezra. I have thus shown that a precise study of the texts of R. Ibn Ezra demonstrates that in fact, Spinoza only projected his own theses onto this author. Much more, he made her say what he had never insinuated, namely that Moses was not the author of the *Pentateuch*. To do this, I analyze point by point the arguments given by Spinoza in the *TTP*, in the name of R. Ibn Ezra, and its sources in the super-commentaries of R. Ibn Ezra, which began to appear in the 13th and 14th centuries. I then appealed to semantic-narratological theories, showing that they are capable of accounting for most of the textual difficulties that Spinoza, as well as several super-commentators of R. Ibn Ezra, were unable to resolve in their reading of the *Pentateuch*. I then specified the status of the Biblical narrator as well as its narratory, and the meaning that should be given to its historicity. I showed that the different forms of Biblical narration always express an integrated interaction between the divine Speaker, the Mosaic narrator, the narratories, and the protagonists of the narratives whose texts are constantly actualized during each of their readings.

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Toward an Ethics of Survival: Paul Ricœur on the Desire to Live and the Effort to Exist

Abstract: This paper argues that certain works by the French philosopher Paul Ricœur reveal hermeneutic attempts at explorations into the desire to remain alive beyond death. Drawing on one of his posthumous works, we will substantiate this claim considering the following three objectives: (1) a review of several somewhat obscure theses found in Ricœur's *Living Up to Death,* which reflect on the desire to persist, to live on through others after death; (2) an inquiry into whether this disposition toward "remaining" alive implicitly calls for what fellow French philosopher Jean Nabert described as the effort to exist, understood in a dual sense: first, as it unfolds in the everyday course of life (prior to the question's emergence), and then, as the desire takes shape; (3) an opportunity to examine the, briefly sketched, hypotheses of an ethics of survival which could emerge from such an endeavour. The articulation of these hermeneutic hypotheses serves both to complement and clarify some aspects of Ricœur's thought.

Keywords: the effort to exist, the desire to live, Paul Ricœur, ethics, hermeneutics.

1. Introduction

Beyond the philosophical intricacies of the (academic) world and the ubiquitous disputes among philosophers, there are within their writings certain things that may capture the attention of less specialized readers. These are matters that concern us all, collectively and individually – elemental aspects of life, questions that, at some point, trouble the ordinary person. It is therefore worthwhile to propose a discussion over certain ideas of the French philosopher Paul Ricœur, which at first glance may seem marginal to his broader body of work.

Under this assumption, this paper seeks to argue that in Paul Ricœur's later works we can find a kind of desire to remain alive beyond death, that is, following Jean Nabert, an effort to exist or to endure life. To this end, we aim to address the following objectives: (1) to review certain relatively obscure theses in Ricœur's thought, particularly as found in *Living*

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Up to Death, concerning the desire to remain alive and to live on through others after death; (2) to ask whether this disposition toward "remaining" alive necessarily calls for the effort to exist, as described by Nabert, in a dual sense: first, as it unfolds in the everyday course of life (prior to the question's emergence), and then, as the desire itself arises; (3) to examine the hypotheses of an ethics of survival which could emerge from our inquiry.

As Paul Ricœur's philosophy is often situated by his interpreters at the intersection of several philosophical domains, we will approach these objectives hermeneutically, frequently employing phenomenological descriptions (almost in a Husserlian sense) to bring to light the surplus of wisdom embedded in the texts covered.

2. The desire to live: "Living up to death"

The book referenced in the title of this section is unlike Ricœur's other works. It is a collection of fragments, the most substantial being "Up to Death: Mourning and Cheerfulness" and "Death." The remaining texts are merely sketches. Charles Reagan (2009) observed that there was no overarching thesis uniting the fragments, which underscores Ricœur's inner soul – searching when confronted with the death of his wife, Simone – a moment that became an opportunity for him to reflect on his own mortality. Thus, *Living Up to Death* stands out within Ricœur's writings as it is uniquely here that the philosopher's thought is most active and visibly at work. On the one hand, the author reflects through action; on the other, he grapples with a profoundly intimate matter: his own death (Abel 2009, viii).

The theses advanced by Ricœur, as far as we can discern, can be summarized as follows: 1) living up to death means one cannot experience one's own death, therefore a dying person should not be regarded as moribund; 2) even though everybody is alone in dying, nobody should die alone; 3) furthermore, the preparation for death is an affirmation of life; and 4) life experienced as a gift can be given up (de Lange 2014, 510). On the other hand, Olivier Abel observed that Ricœur sought to answer three key questions: 1) what representation can I give myself? (that is, to identify the figures of the imaginary), 2) what is their root? (an analysis of mourning and cheerfulness), and 3) am I still a Christian? (in other words, finding out in what way he is not a Christian philosopher) (Abel 2009, viii).

Interpreters of Ricœur's work have been seduced by the way in which he relates to life and death in the aforementioned writings, uncovering fragments written in 1996 that were later expanded in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Ricœur 2004). Likewise, the philosopher's death, marked by his effort to remain alive until his final moment, has been compared with that of Czech philosopher Jan Patočka's (Sternad 2017). It has been argued

that both Ricœur and Patočka agreed on the belief that a phenomenology of life and life after death must begin with a thorough analysis of the intersubjective character of life (Sternad 2017, 537). Ricœur's death, as far as we can tell, could be included in a study such as the one by Costica Bradatan (2019), because the philosopher remained unwaveringly faithful to his own ideas until the very end.

Writing about the fragments in which Ricœur discusses palliative care (de Lange 2014), or the one describing his close relation with Derrida (Putt 2011) titled "Jacques Derrida," his commentators have only briefly touched on what seems to us to be the deeper philosophical significance of these theses. Ricœur places a special emphasis on others, asserting that it is through them that we can sustain our place in the world even when we are no longer here. This, of course, brings to light the profound instability of our lives: the constant interplay of being among others while simultaneously striving to be ourselves (Abel 2009, xii). Ricœur's central idea (2009, 42) is to love the other, the one who outlives us, and, at the same time, to *transfer* to them our love for life. Consequently, the ethical dimension of the discourse on death lies in the understanding that "detachment" from this side of death constitutes a "gain" or, put differently, a liberation that allows us to focus on the essentials of life.

In the aforementioned fragments, we find three meanings of death that Ricœur discusses, namely: 1) the encounter with the death of others; 2) the figures of the imaginary, or death as an event; and 3) death as a fictional character. Firstly, the encounter with death occurs when a loved one passes away. This event raises a multitude of questions, such as whether the deceased has vanished entirely or continues to exist somewhere "out there" (Ricœur 2009, 7). Naturally, these are questions posed by the still living, yet they serve to create a connection between the deceased and death. Moreover, the French philosopher investigates the ontological being of the dead (Ricœur 2009, 7). It is intriguing that we consistently refer to the deceased not merely as lifeless corpses, but in personal terms, when speaking of "my departed" or "our dead." This linguistic and conceptual framing highlights a relational perspective on death, suggesting that the dead occupy a unique and persistent place in our lives that extends beyond their physical absence.

So why do we ask ourselves these questions, and where does this concern for the dead come from? According to Ricœur (2009, 8), it is because we always seek to mourn for ourselves. Being still alive, our relationship with life remains unclear and altered by the anticipation and internalization of our uncertainties about those already deceased (Ricœur 2009, 8). In short, what Paul Ricœur is preoccupied here is the struggle against the image of tomorrow's dead; the dead that each of us will become for those who outlive us. The logic of this thought is straightforward: just as

we outlive our dead, so too will others outlive us. This reflection brings into focus the continuity of life through an intergenerational connection, where mourning for the dead reflects an existential mirroring of our own eventual mortality.

On the other hand, the second meaning of death in Ricœur's philosophy, namely *death as an event*, consists in the banality of dying, an occurrence that inevitability awaits each of us in the future. It is rather the anticipation of the event of death: the living who "see" their own death in the deaths of others. This is the reason Ricœur presupposes that it is easier to survive than to witness the event of death (Ricœur 2009, 13), as this immediate confrontation with death induces dread in the dying-to-be. However, if we relate to the death of loved ones, surviving them is an act of courage, because survival is intertwined with mourning. The images of the deaths of others serve as mirrors through which we internalize and reflect upon our own mortality. And this contemplation creates a kind of anticipatory agony, prefiguring the image of ourselves as the dead (to be) in the eyes of those who witness these events. Thinking in this way, how exactly can we resolve the dilemma of existence? While we are alive, "still" being alive is a source of joy, but being still alive is precisely what makes the fear of death possible, for the ongoing condition of life serves as a reminder of its finitude.

Lastly, what would it mean that death is a fictional character? For Ricœur this notion suggests that, under certain circumstances, in dreams or through literary imagery, the living "exterminate" humanity. Examples are readily available and by now almost banal: wars, epidemics, and other catastrophic events. This perspective equates death with evil, revisiting a theme Ricœur explored early in his youth and continued to reassess throughout his work (Ricœur 1969). Death, therefore, is rather a human failure, and however much we retreat into solitude, we only escape others in the act of death (Bradatan 2023, 175): only then would we want to look back, only then would we want to seek out the others who will outlive us. No one escapes death, which is why our efforts, both individual and collective, are towards surviving it. In its last moments, man becomes a total failure, and what Ricœur calls into question is our effort to resist becoming as failure. Yet, how much inner strength should man have to resist death? Where does the persistent desire to continue a precarious, death-bound existence come from? Could death serve as the measure of a life well-lived? That is to say, might life itself be a time for the creation of another time, echoing an earlier distinction by Ricœur between the time of life and the time of the work? Viewed through this lens, life becomes an opportunity to shape a continuation, an enduring narrative that extends beyond individual mortality.

3. On the effort to exist: the influence of Jean Nabert

Jean Nabert's name is one that frequently appears in Paul Ricœur's works. This due to the reflexive tradition from which Ricœur draws in his philosophical theses (Ricœur 2007). French philosopher Philippe Capelle-Dumont (2011) has inventoried the ways in which Ricœur traces to some of his theses from Nabert; for example, he suggests that like Nabert, Ricœur is interested in the philosophy of finitude and, of course, most importantly, the two are philosophers of *mediation* when it comes to the hermeneutics of the self, since they both held that there can be no hermeneutics of the self without there being a hermeneutics of the work that the self produces and without the contribution of alterity.

For our purpose here, however, it is important to consider Nabert's (1943) idea of the desire to be, which also assumes the effort to exist. In Nabert's line of thought the desire to be is correlated with duty, within a well-defined ethical framework (Nabert 1943, 154). In short, as Jarosław Jakubowski observes (2022, 191) the effort to exist constitutes for Jean Nabert that which uniformizes the history of a life. In other words, for Nabert (1943, 88), the values of action and the values of ethics are linked to the effort that falls to the individual consciousness to return to its own truth, that is, to the truth of the whole. Moreover, duty should not be understood merely as a moment or a condition for the flowering of our effort to be; but duty together with effort should spontaneously give rise to a will (Nabert 1943, 143).

On the other hand, Ricœur talks about the capable man in a somewhat elusive manner on several occasions. In *Oneself as Another*, in order to characterize the capable man, the philosopher's vocabulary has "attestation" as its central concept; that is, he first notes that actions are ascribed to an agent. Thus, "'attestation' best describes the way of believing associated with statements such as *je crois que je peux* (Ricœur 2004, 140). Ricœur's hypothesis is that at this level of attestation there is a kind of semantic kinship between attestation and self-recognition, and that this includes the recognition of responsibility. In other words, by recognizing that "a self" performs an action, the latter is "attested" as a capacity of this self to do, but at the same time responsibility for what is performed is also demanded (Ricœur 2004, 140). To be capable of something is to confess this capacity and thus to assume responsibility for the consequences.

So to ascribe capacities to an agent is therefore to appeal to an *other*, in order to give certainty to the belief that "I can"; from which it follows that the whole issue is pushed into the social realm, which leads the French philosopher to accept that their mediation takes place at the level of personal identity (Ricœur 2013, 327). We add to the above an important

observation: among the capacities of an invidivid is the capacity to suffer – in other words, the vulnerability of the human being (Ricœur 2013, 327). In *Oneself as Another* the capable human being is the one "who acts and suffers" (Ricœur 2020, 18); and by capable human being he means the human being who is capable "of speaking, of acting, of making promises" (Ricœur 2020, 18). In virtue of all these things, the philosopher adopts as a philosophical maxim that the life of any human being is as important as our own (Ricœur 2020, 18).

Therefore, in everyday life, the capable man is confronted with action and is permanently subject to suffering; hence his effort to exist is constant, and the desire to live is manifested not only in the order of the social, but most probably also at the instinctive level. Man copes with life because there is this intrinsic desire to stay alive. On the other hand, the dying man, that is to say the man towards the end of its life, who still embodies Ricœur's idea of the capable human, tends to continue living. It is at this point that the question arises as to remaining alive after death. Remaining alive after death is the average mean of the effort to exist and the desire to live. The dying person lives in a time of conclusions and implications; they leave little things behind – a name, for example – or a work to those who will follow him or her. In this essential transfer from the dying to others, delicate matters come into play. We all know Plato's name (and hopefully also his work), just as we know the names of some of the executioners of history, but precisely because there is an ethical dimension to the aforementioned transfer, we remember Plato in a certain way and those executioners in another. Therefore, are there, at the level discussed by the French philosopher, some premises for an ethic of survival, as long as the self constantly feels the contribution of otherness?

4. The premises of an ethics of survival

With all the above considered, what would an ethics of survival consist of? Precisely in strengthening the relationship with the otherness of the other. This, in turn, requires the "other" to agree to preserve the memory of the deceased. Thus, a first premise of such an ethics is that of the "yes" that the other must grant – a fundamental act of recognition and acceptance. Let us insist on these a little further.

Paul Ricœur identifies two lines of thought regarding death: 1) perfect detachment and 2) trust in God's care. If the latter appears to be more of a theological perspective on death, the former is profoundly philosophical. What does this "detachment from oneself" mean? The answer is rather straightforward: the unrestricted deconstruction of the imaginary of survival (Ricœur 2009, 13). More concretely, this deconstruction involves two aspects: on the one hand, it signifies the

definitive fulfilment of the work of mourning; and on the other hand, it points to the ethical dimension of this detachment from the self carried through to its ultimate conclusion.

Invoking Meister Eckhart, Ricœur suggests that the ultimate fulfilment of the work of mourning relies on letting go of one's self-attachment. In other words, self-attachment implies self-detachment, which involves renouncing the imaginary projections of one's self-identity after death (Ricœur 2009, 42). Here, Ricœur introduces the concept of the *same*, which refers, first, to the same of one's own life before death, and then to the same of the survivors who will follow, that is, to what is lost through death. Specifically, it concerns the same that I have been throughout my life and the same that remains, after my death, through others. In this sense, death signifies the end of life within the time I shared myself, while living, with those who will outlive me (Ricœur 2009, 42). Therefore, as Ricœur writes, survival, or what-remains, is oriented toward others, the survivors.

From this self-detachment emerges the ethical dimension of the issue of survival. Taken to its conclusion, self-detachment involves transferring one's love of life to the *other*. Therefore, as Ricœur writes: "To love the other, my survivor. This 'agape' component of renouncing one's own survival completes 'detachment' this side of death: it is not just loss, but a gain: liberation for the essential" (Ricœur 2009, 42). He also notes that the great Rhineland mystics displayed an openness towards the essential, the fundamental, attributed to their detachment from the inessential. Thus, it follows that a disposition toward the fundamental motivates the transfer or projection of our love of life onto others (Ricœur 2009, 42). This transfer inherently involves the I-Thou relationship, which is essentially characterized by reciprocity. The one who is dying is oriented toward the fundamental, yet the transfer of the love of life would be impossible if the one receiving this love were not similarly disposed. The transfer of love for life to the one who will outlive me is "grounded" in the detachment of both poles: the self and the other. For Ricœur, this transfer *verifies*, *attests*, and *puts to the test* this detachment within the dimension of generosity (Ricœur 2009, 42).

In this disposition toward the fundamental, interpreters of Ricœur have identified similarities with Spinoza's *conatus* as a desire to persist in existence, Freud's *libido*; Leibniz's *appetite*, Jean Nabert's articulation of *the desire to be and the effort to exist*; Arendt's *natality*, and even Bergson's *élan vital* (de Lange 2014, 514). All of these are directly connected to mourning, which here emerges as an extension of *Gelassenheit*, the state of serene letting-go proposed by Meister Eckhart (Joy 2011, 250). This suggests that mourning, in Ricœur's perspective, is not merely a process of loss and detachment but also a profound affirmation of life. This latter connection to *Gelassenheit* reveals the spiritual depth of mourning, transforming it into a

process of release and renewal, one that affirms life even in the face of its inevitable transience.

Hence, this first line of thought about death, which consists of a perfect detachment, entails the deconstruction of the imaginary of survival. As we have seen, mourning plays a dual role: it is directed both toward the passing of others and toward the inevitable passing of oneself. Moreover, when Ricœur distinguishes between the time of life – the length of time from one's birth to one's death, and the time of the work – how long a particular work endures, circulates, or, in other words, "lives" in the public consciousness, he asks what life means for the living. His response is: "It means dissociating the immortal from the mortal in his proper name by removing the work accomplished by him" (Ricœur 2009, 59-60). Accordingly, these two times overlap until the point where dissociation begins – the time of withdrawal, existentially understood as a retreat, and the time of disappearance (Ricœur 2009, 60). It is noticeable that this time of withdrawal can be readily correlated with mourning, for just as mourning prepares me for death and at the same time predisposes me to the fundamental and the possibility of transferring the love of life, the time of dissociation bridges the time of life and the time of the work. In the retreat from the personal into the realm of the enduring marks a transition from individual finitude to the extended existence of one's contributions in the cultural sphere. In doing so, this highlights Ricœur's vision of life persisting beyond death, not through metaphysical survival, but through a legacy that continues within others. Furthermore, these – mourning and the time of withdrawal, which extends beyond the time of life – have life itself as their reference point. Mourning is almost an ascetic attitude (Joy 2011, 250), as is the time of dissociation, during which the author, with their final efforts, finalizes their work. We can affirm, alongside Ricœur, that both the transfer of the love of life to others and "pushing" the work from the time of life into the time of the work share the same outcome: remaining alive after death.

The second line of thought, as mentioned above, explores the implications of having trust in God. According to Ricœur, this trust in God encompasses the meaning, intelligibility, and justification of existence, conceived in a way distinct from imaginary projections (Ricœur 2009, 43). In essence, Ricœur is captivated by an idea borrowed from the English philosopher Alfred North Whitehead: the *memory* of God. Specifically, he writes: "God will remember me. Risk of making it a hypocritical form of imaginary projection, of 'consolation' as a concession to the imaginary – in short, as an imperfect detachment" (Ricœur 2009, 43). The meaning of a fleeting existence is conceptualized within this framework as a "trace" in the memory of God. Practically speaking, every existence *makes a difference* in God. The memory discussed here can be associated with a form of

"forgiveness," understood as a rediscovered sense of rapprochement. In other words, at stake here is God's *care* for me. As long as my existence leaves a trace in the memory of God, He must care for me. If this is the case, nothing that ever constituted my existence will be lost (Ricœur 2009, 46).

In attempting to reconcile these two perspectives – on the one hand, detachment, pushed to the point of renouncing the imaginary of survival; and on the other, trust in God's care – Ricœur comes to see in the Christic example the very paradox of survival. In his words: "It is precisely in this core that the detachment from oneself, in obedience to the mission, and the relation to the others get conjoined. Die for the benefit of. This connection, which has been theorized about in a dubious sacrificial theology in terms of a substituted victim, is at the heart of the Song of the Suffering Servant as dying for. To give [is?] life. The gift transfers [transforms?] the detachment for the benefit of the other" (Ricœur 2009, 53). It follows, therefore, that Ricœur's perspective on death highlights the fact that these corollary notions – dying as a kind of rebirth (through others) and living against death – brings him closer to Arendt's perspective and further away from Heidegger's, as Richard Kearney notes (2011, 224). We can observe in the last writings of the French philosopher his desire to remain alive, to live through others – a persistent to exist, even as his own life approached its end. A final act that underscores his enduring affirmation of life, a stance that blends within it the ethical and relational dimensions of survival with a profound acknowledgment of human finitude.

Here are Catherine Goldenstein's (2009, 95) words on Ricœur's final efforts to exist: "Starting in September his sense of getting closer to death grew. 'People see me as looking better than I feel' was something he said often then. Then, 'I know it is coming, I am in the process of disappearing' – and a few days before his death: 'I have entered a unique time...'" Thus, these are the words of a man standing at the threshold of death, intent on living fully up to the end and resist death, not in the sense of denying its inevitability but by stripping it of its triumph, ensuring that his life would continue in others, through others, and for others. While it might be tempting to see Ricœur's ideas, supported by his own example, as indicative of a form of religious belief, this is not the case. The "new life" envisioned by the French philosopher is "achieved" through the projection of one's love of life onto others. A profoundly human process that is in fact independent of any particular religion or creed. As such, it cannot be confined to any community of faith (Kearney 2011, 225). The transfer of the love of life from one self to others presupposes an ethical framework without which it could not take place. This entire process of remaining among the living, therefore, constitutes an ethics of survival, rooted in

intersubjectivity and sustained by the mutual openness and responsibility between individuals.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The desire to live, or, more precisely, to remain alive through others, justifies the wondrous fact of being alive. For Ricœur, everything happens within this world. Indeed, toward the end of an early work, Ricœur (1966, 475) quoted Rilke's words: "Hiersein ist herrlich" (Being here is wonderful), emphasizing that to be in this life is indeed something of a wonder. Even at that stage, the French philosopher highlighted the uniqueness of this world. While it may not be the best of all possible worlds, it is uniquely significant for each individual, with its goodness not having, in itself, degrees. Our world is inherently good and contains the fundamental life-affirming "yes" of being (Ricœur 1966, 475).

Furthermore, Ricœur's philosophical endeavour points toward an *ethics of survival*, as we have demonstrated. The concept of mourning, which speaks of a disposition toward the fundamental, enables the transfer of the love of life to others. This projection carries profound ethical implications because it is grounded in the intersubjective nature of life. Such a transfer of the love of life can only take place if the recipient is "open." In other words, it cannot occur without the explicit desire of the other. It is precisely this "openness" of the other that produces the possibility for one to remain alive through them.

Thus, we conclude that this ethics of survival both generates and is in turn generated by the desire to be and the effort to exist. It represents, so to speak, the itinerary of our finite life toward living (on) after death through others. Ultimately, Paul Ricœur's attempt to resist death demonstrates nothing less than his refusal to be crushed by the problem of death. Instead, he sought to give its proper place to the theme of birth (Ricœur 1998, 93–94), entrusting those still alive with the responsibility of inheriting his desire to be and his effort to exist.

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Existential Authenticity, Populism and the Ideal of a Good Life

Abstract: Authenticity is a guiding concept in existentialism, as it provides the basis of a proper understanding of peculiar existentialist themes and notions such as anxiety, individuality, otherness, freedom, selfhood, self-consciousness or responsibility. Basically, authenticity regards our own innermost self, our sheer individuality. Authenticity gives us a sense of self. However, authenticity is not a natural given, but a challenge for the individual to embark on a journey towards becoming a true self. Starting from Søren Kierkegaard's fundamental distinction between the individual and the crowd, we will discuss the fate of the postmodern concept of authenticity that has been slowly stripped of its initial meanings in the philosophical discourse. On the surface, this authenticity still resembles its existentialist meanings, but at the core has become a customizable commodity, able to accommodate a more free-floating, versatile, opportunistic view of the person, one that means whatever the speaker wants it to signify, and promises to be radically liberating. This "new kind" of authenticity implies, among other meanings, the requisite of reaching a different, superior version of the self, following the assumption that people are born and grow into a sort of imperfect, flawed, inferior, rigid state, that they need to transcend. The pressure to restore or discover an ideal of authenticity that is just a placeholder can be easily transformed into a powerful ideological device, a political instrument. In this respect, we draw on a few views that treat authenticity as central to understanding various populist movements of our times. We believe that what might operate as an antidote to the empty contemporary popular understanding of authenticity is to link it to the ideal of a good life, one that comes with the idea of responsibilization and continuous questioning of one's current commitments, including values such as authenticity itself.

Keywords: Authenticity, Existentialism, Individual, Kierkegaard, Masses, Populism.

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(Motto) "*You can be anything you want to be*
Just turn yourself into anything you think that you could ever be
Be free with your tempo be free be free
Surrender your ego be free be free to yourself" (Queen, Innuendo)

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Introduction

It's difficult to start a conversation about authenticity and connected concepts, such as truthfulness, veracity and fakeness, without taking into account the contemporary spread of antiscientific discourse, the "post-truth" discourse or anti-establishment movements, and last but not least, the muddy waters of the culture wars, over the disputed notions of tolerance of the intolerant, free speech, or cancel culture. The rise of populism has been increasingly heavily infused with authenticity rhetoric, applied to define a certain type of citizen who is uniquely qualified to have a voice and claim political power in the new postmodern world, where he is under alleged attack from the forces of globalization and multiculturalism. While far-right populists seized and used this empty, free-floating concept of authenticity that refers to a class of people coming from a "deep", "true", and "authentic" part of a nation, either geographically or demographically, that represents its soul or true core and it is the only one capable of defending and promoting its values. This special kind of people doesn't have the shame or fear of the antagonizing forces of the open society defendants, however, there is also growing support for this authenticity agenda that resembles a more traditionally progressive narrative. If conservatives are using the concept of authenticity in relation to an ideal and idealized "true people", among the left and liberals the term contains different ideological assumptions, serving quite distinct interests. Nevertheless, over the past years, the discourse of the true people has come closer to the practices of self-care and self-development resonating from more progressive or liberal spaces. A concern for physical and mental hygiene, to preserve the purity of the ideal, true citizen's body and mind, is now more apparent than ever. Well-being and spiritual influencers, who are searching for true spiritual practices and genuine self-care outlets that were previously designed to help individuals transcend a state of underdevelopment or inauthenticity are now used to consolidate more ethnonationalist goals. We will talk about these two parallel conceptions throughout this paper, attempting to bring back Kierkegaard as a voice that might help restore the possibility of thinking clearly about authenticity and its reputation.

In 2020, a very popular YouTuber (Jenna Marbles) decided to end her online presence, after deciding the pressures of her critiques were too strong for her to continue with her work. Soon after, another YouTube

channel was tragically announcing the Death of Authenticity, describing the "woke" witch hunts as a gateway to silencing everyone and preventing them from expressing their innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires online. In the light of this particular notion of authenticity developed inside the social media circles, the influencer is expected to display the process of his becoming, by making accessible to the larger public the old and the new ideas, controversial or not, that have preceded the current moment. What has to be noted is the fact that while pleading for maintaining an intact record of all the performances of an influencer, even when they circulate questionable ideas, not only promotes the belief that this is the only way to understand the transformation, the process of the authentic development of a person but also opens the door to putting forth previously unpopular or contentious ideas. In this light, everything one does or says becomes acceptable, because it is part of a journey of self-edification, and unfolding a person's authenticity cannot be understood without embracing all facets of its personality, either dark or praiseworthy.

In this particular context, it is difficult to separate any discussion on the concept of authenticity from the fact that authenticity itself has become commodified, a fabricated and monetized product that influencers strive to create, embody, and convey to their audience and the larger public, in order to make their presence popular and attract views. In this paper, we will discuss some of the ways in which the concept of authenticity has slowly and superficially been misappropriated keeping some of its existentialist semantic charges, but at the same time, these meanings were transformed in a flexible, opportunistic, and promising radically liberating view of the human being that means whatever the speaker wants it to mean at a certain time. This malleable and customizable view that has been embraced and promoted by pop culture, has become one of the tropes of self-help and spiritual gurus, then in the later years became commodified to attract followership and even transformed into a political instrument. As a political instrument, authenticity is central to understanding populist movements, leaders, and their spread across political systems all over the world, namely among most of the established Western democracies in the age of disillusionment, but mostly in countries that haven't come to terms with their past. After analyzing how authenticity has lost its "true core", we will try to see if we are able to reclaim it, going back to one of the voices that first made it popular in the philosophical world, and can bring some optimism to the attempt of putting it to the use of virtuous self-development, as an ethical ideal. Discarding all the corrupt meanings attacking the term, coming from social media, advertising and marketing, management and entrepreneurship, politics, or self-help, domains that have put authenticity under trial, we must first begin with an understanding and dismantling of these meanings.

Kierkegaard's concept of authenticity is developed on the interface between the individual and the crowd. The notion of the mass-man refuses the idea of achieving true authenticity while giving in to external pressures of society or passively absorbing the values, roles, and virtues imposed by society and its push for conformism. This definition is at odds with the present-day discourse on happiness, which often draws from positive psychology and coaching industry, which promotes a version of "authenticity" that is tied to an obsession with self-optimization and has the notion of individual responsibility at its core (see more in Illouz and Cabanas, 2019). The postmodern society, dominated by the happiness industry which demands authenticity as an emotional ideal to be experienced and displayed with industriousness paradoxically turns it into the societal pressure that Kierkegaard urges us to resist in order to live a life that is true to ourselves.

While Kierkegaard looks for a view of the true self as one that needs to be decontaminated by societal pressures, Heidegger (see 1962) and Sartre (see 1948) develop accounts of authenticity in which the individual has to constantly balance the personal will and collective responsibilities and expectations. Charles Taylor talked about the ethos of authenticity in a culture that has been more and more concerned with narcissistic self-absorption. Social media added to the concerns expressed by Taylor, by amplifying and complicating the search for authenticity.

As a result of enslaving society to vanity metrics, measuring the contents people expose and present about themselves, we have been slowly allured by and become slaves of a commodified version of authenticity. Or better said, of several versions of authenticity, applied to self, relationships, spirituality, leadership, and society in general, namely politics. Authenticity has become a commodity that can be accessed via several mechanisms. Applied to the self or the other, there are two main accounts or directions of this search for authenticity, that are not orthogonal but feed into each other and sometimes compensate for each other. Both require a certain degree of performativeness and imply the idea of reaching a new/different/superior state of self. The implicit assumption is that people are born and grow into a sort of imperfect flawed, inferior, rigid state, that they need to transcend. Restoring or discovering authenticity as a quality of the self through "authentic growth" can be transformed into an ideological device when either it's designed to hijack all personal resources in this endeavor, when it is deployed to attack the mechanisms of social solidarity, or when it is distorted enough to make certain political behaviors and attitudes acceptable.

The Authenticity of the Individual

Authenticity regards our own most inner self, our sheer individuality. However, this quality is not a natural given but can be better understood as a challenge for the individual to embark on a journey towards becoming a true self. According to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, this journey of the individual is endangered by a phenomenon he calls leveling: "For leveling really to take place, a phantom must first be raised, the spirit of leveling, a monstrous abstraction, and all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage – and this phantom is the public" (2000, 261). Becoming a self does not happen spontaneously (at least not if we want this to happen authentically), but as a result of a deliberate and conscious effort. In fact, for most existentialists, the search for authenticity is an ongoing, never-ending process that only stops with the individual's existence, and does not allow for self-indulgence. Also, the end result is not something that is achieved or "conquered", a set condition that once reached, will guarantee and lock the individual into that state of authentic living.

One of Kierkegaard's main ideas regarding existential authenticity is that each individual is solely responsible for giving meaning to his life and living it sincerely (thus authentically). Essentially, Kierkegaard was a Christian thinker, and even if Christianity might be understood as a religion of blind faith and obedience and a doctrine to be taught, Kierkegaard believed that it is rather a life to be lived and experienced through an individual relationship with God (Emery 2021, 2-3). Thus, Kierkegaard's understanding of authenticity is primarily found in the faith-based religious ethic. As such, the knight of faith's decision to follow God's dictates (a subject thoroughly discussed in *Fear and Trembling*) is not only an act of resignation to God's authority but "an act of individual self-assertion that brings the individual to the highest form of life possible", that is the religious life (Rae 2010, 77). Therefore, the authentic life is a free individual choice life, be it a religious life determined by an individual relationship with God. However, this does not mean that Kierkegaard understands authenticity only in these strict religious terms. As Aaron Simmons notes in a recent paper, Kierkegaard "does not dismiss lived, and embodied, historical human existence, but simply a particular authority from which such existence is understood to receive its significance: *the crowd*" (2021, 3).

In this respect, Kierkegaard rejects the quantitative judgment of 'the crowd' in favor of the qualitative neighbor-love community (Simmons 2021, 1). The crowd uses a quantitative judgment, which makes the existential decision of the individual (as part of the crowd) irrelevant. As Simmons notes: "Here (the crowd, the majority, the multitude [AN]) we see that quantity, itself, becomes the standard of significance such that truth is abandoned in the name of popularity" (2021, 5). In turn, Kierkegaard writes

that: "to love the crowd or pretend to love it, to make it the authority for *the truth*, is the way to acquire tangible power, the way to all kinds of temporal and worldly advantage – it is also untruth, since the crowd is untruth" (2000, 111).

The individual's authenticity does not come with achieving worldly power or popularity, as they are provided by the authority of the crowd. The quantitative anonymity of the crowd negatively affects the individual's task of becoming an authentic self, which is more possible in the qualitative neighbor-love community. In another edifying place, Kierkegaard states: "To honor every individual human being, unconditionally every human being, this is the truth and is to fear God and to love *the neighbor*; but ethically-religiously to recognize 'the crowd' as the authority with regard to *the truth* is to deny God and cannot possibly be loving *the neighbor*. *The neighbor* is the absolutely true expression for human equality" (2000, 111). This expression of human equality is what Kierkegaard refers to as community. For the Danish philosopher, the community "occurs when we lean into the responsibility that singularizes us as individuals and positions us as neighbors. Whereas the crowd turns us into nobodies, the community is glimpsed in the love command and the equality of all humanity announced by God" (Simmons 2021, 6).

Loving the neighbor and the community are central concepts in Kierkegaard's thought. Clarifying them in depth exceeds the scope of this paper. What should be underlined is that according to Kierkegaard, reaching existential authenticity is an individual, but not a solipsistic or a narcissistic endeavor. Religiously, the individual reaches existential authenticity through a direct relationship with God. But this does not rule out completely the possibility of living authentically among people, since the individual is not "opposed to community, but to the way that the crowd eliminates the singularity of becoming" (Simmons, 2021, 7).

Kierkegaard is defining the self in a process of becoming, focusing on an agent that is best understood in opposition to the mob, or the masses. The latter terms represent types of entities that do not fully allow the becoming of the self, as the individual's identity, uniqueness, and moral responsibility merge and dissipate into the public, as a result of collective pressure. The individual has to win the conflict with the abstract and empty notions of the public, the mob, or the masses, that only create social pressure, or leveling.

In our days, Charles Taylor depicts a more nuanced approach, that describes authenticity itself as a result of the social pressure described by Kierkegaard. The modern era has brought authenticity wars, between its committed followers and detractors. For Taylor, many strive for authenticity in a way that is similar to a religious experience: "many people feel *called* to do this (pursue a life of authentic self-fulfillment), feel they

ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it" (1992, 17). Charles Taylor points to the fact that the search for authenticity became cult-like, flooded by an afflux of self-obsessed attitudes. According to him, postmodern life is featured by a narcissistic tendency, one that he describes as the essential manifestation of the "me generation": "People no longer have a sense of a higher purpose, of something worth dying for. […] dark side of individualism is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (Taylor 1992, 4). Taylor's idea reminds us of Kierkegaard's notion of leveling, which leaves little room for individuality. In our times, this leveling phenomenon affects the nature of the relations between people, which become more instrumental.[1] In Taylor's words, "once the creatures that surround us lose the significance that accrued to their place in the chain of being, they are open to being treated as raw materials or instruments for our projects" (1992, 5).

The Canadian philosopher insists on the need to discern between a more Kierkegaardian or benign form of authentic living and a more "bad", undesirable form: the inauthentic authenticity. A similar idea is expressed by Charles Guignon, who points to the dangers of the distorted or self-indulgent forms of authenticity. For Guignon, authenticity is best defined echoing Kierkegaard, as a "project of becoming who you are" (2004, 4), of achieving "truthfulness" with regards to oneself, and "fundamentally and irreducibly a social virtue" (2004, 151). Taylor advocates for retaining the idea of self-transcendence, that would guard against the meaninglessness of contemporary society.

To the contemporary challenge of intoxicating self-obsession, we find the work of Kierkegaard particularly informative and actual. The idea that maybe deserves to be revisited the most is that authenticity is an active endeavor of creating the true self. The individual is at the confluence of several forces that guide his behaviors and the way he resolves his goal conflicts or conflicts between several moral loyalties, will ultimately decide his success in achieving an authentic life. For some contemporary philosophers, Kierkegaard's approach to finding one's true authentic self is seen as a force that can be vital or at least essential for the health of this society. Gordon Marino, for instance, authored an *Existentialist's Survival Guide (How to Live Authentically in an Inauthentic Age)* in which he attempts to popularize the Danish philosopher's ideas, among those of other existentialists, as a toolkit delivered in a style that resembles more that of a life coach. Other authors also approach ignored aspects of this potent notion, at least in politically hijacked and fabricated versions of the notion. It is the case of Catherine Fieschi and her book *Populocracy: The Tyranny of Authenticity and the Rise of Populism* (which we will further discuss in a later

section), where she puts authenticity at the core of the rise of populist movements and their current triumph in some countries.

Two Versions of Postmodern Authenticity

Focusing on the notion's meanings as an intrapersonal tool that serves self-discovery, self-growth, and improvement, authenticity is "sold" in different formulas. One assumption for instance sells the idea that there is a true, deep version of the self, that needs to be uncovered (unearthed, unfolded). Reaching this true self might imply a process best understood as mask-shedding. Masks are social tools that were purportedly created and worn to hide flaws, vices, imperfections or other perceived inadequacies, traditionally deemed as socially undesirable. The fear and disdain of the inauthentic gives rise to a new ideal, for both individuals and public personas (politicians), which defines authenticity as the result of a process of displaying a raw, unpolished, "unedited", vulnerable version of the self. This ideal, authentic self is a truth to be uncovered, a reality that needs to be freely accessed behind the veils imposed by appearance. The authentic, genuine, true self is static, and can only take one version, as it represents what is hidden behind the layers of years of sustained (self-)deception. Achieving it aims for realness, not necessarily consistency or congruence with the past self. Actually, in this understanding, the self has the possibility to reform itself at any moment, because a radical act of reinvention, disavowal or redemption can happen at any moment. The idea behind this version of authenticity is that human flaws and shortcomings are fundamentally human, and the act of performing cosmetic operations aimed at hiding them is a sign of the intention to use deception, a symptom of much deeper corruptness and unreliability. In this view, the transparent villain is seen as a lesser evil in comparison to the "polished", educated, measured and composed politician. Even if both are suspected of hypocrisy, the first one is less dangerous just because it signals a form of "authentic", a radically open and honest one.

The alternative empirical assumption, which resides more on an interpersonal account about the authentic self is dominated by an individual project that aims to seek, explore and ultimately grow or discover a new version of the self that is "free" and genuine, liberated from constraints imposed by the society or other groups the individual is part of (family, peers, coworkers). This view has been pushed by the humanistic and positive psychology movements, that insisted on a view of psychopathology as arising from a discrepancy between subjective experiences and external behaviors. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) posits that an authentic individual is capable of making self-determined and authentic

choices, a trait that enables the achievement of optimal well-being. In this frame, central to authenticity is the idea of autonomy, or acting in accordance to one's desires, values, and interests. The individual has access to these aspects that define his wants and at the same time, chooses to act in a manner that is aligned to them. Individual autonomy is essential and it is in antinomy to a tendency to act to please others or merely fulfill certain societal norms and expectations. Essential to self-determination theory is the idea of self-chosen action, and genuineness is secondary, similarly to how it is to Sartre or existential psychotherapists.

Growth sustained by an active search for the self, seen as a negotiation of virtues, role models, and hero journeys is this time an open-ended pursuit. This authentic self takes the form of what results from a cumulative sum of dispositional factors aided by an entrepreneurial mentality, starting with the quality and perseverance of individual strivings, combined with incidental factors like luck or finding a good partner, which can be a therapist, guru, guide or coach. The incidental factors are constructed in such a way that they seem to be subsumed not to chance or serendipity but to the quality of one's own motivation and vision: a governing underlying belief such as the so-called "law of attraction" suggests, for example, that if individuals know what they want and display adequate amounts of positive expectations, clarity and tenacity channeled towards those existential goals, the "universe will conspire" (Byrne, 2001). Aids, props, and chance will all mystically become part of the individual quest for the authentic self. The presumptive end result is advertised as something that is the opposite of a simple version of the self that is carved by conformism. Embedded in this understanding of the authentic self is the idea that prior to any attempt at self-discovery, self-realization, self-actualization, individuals are not necessarily fundamentally flawed (as the previous worldview assumes), but rather they usually come into this world as imperfect or incomplete, and are further constrained by education and sometimes by society and circumstances, to follow or continue to manifest these deficient, insufficient initial versions of themselves. The self-care industry promises a liberation from these constraints and promises the individual assistance in surpassing them. The result is an ideal, or the "best version of the self". In contrast to the first version of the self, the one that is shedding all the external constraints to reach the liberty to manifest in its natural, uncensored, fundamentally human quality, which in the end seems to have a rather fixed or expected outcome, resembling a Sartrian view of authentic living, in this view, authenticity seems to be closer to a process-based understanding. It is a developmental process and does not aim for an end goal that once it is achieved, the state of authenticity can be declared.

The marketing of both these two versions of selfhood describes the human being to us as one that is full of imperfections, vices, or, in the light

of the medical model defining human development, full of pathological or subclinical tendencies or vulnerabilities. However, this view of the person is definitely more characteristic of the second model, which contains a melioristic account of the individual, one that expects and requires the hope for improvement. While the first one only wants people to have the liberty to manifest their true selves as they are, warts and all, without a need for transformation, optimization, or remedy, the second one is dependent on an idea of authenticity edification as a series of deficits-that-need-to-be-overcome model. The individual needs to be measured, and put into certain parameters defined in connection to minimal standards or benchmarks, be they in terms of cognitive, social functioning, or ethical standards. The person is expected to perform within certain limits and anything that deviates from those is seen as a symptom of the lack of genuineness. The rising and wide popularity of this conception of the individual creates the artificial need to perpetually seek an artificial, commodified version of authenticity. People are called to engage in various types of projects to uncover better, improved versions of themselves, that will help them transcend the gullible, conformist masses, and bring improvements or the repair needed to compensate for the shortcomings in their self-constitution. The deficit or vulnerability is overcome through self-exploration, self-discovery, and creative journeys that are completely free of any constraints, including – in recent times – the perceived tyranny of cancel culture. This looming threat of cancel culture and of the free-speech censors is nevertheless more marked in the first model because it is seen as a barrier, an inhibiting factor that seeks to delegitimize attempts at limitless self-expression of the true self. In this view, cancel culture and political correctness are seen as oppressing factors that limit the possibility of authentic self-expression.

This artificially created need for constant self-discovery, self-growth, and transformation is covered by constantly looking into inspirational spiritual activities or cultural products, but also quickly served by therapists, self-help gurus, wellness experts, yoga masters, or special retreats. Spiritual practice, praying, travel, or writing can be among the ways in which individuals can reach this genuine sense of self. In our opinion, this free-floating account of authenticity is questionable for several reasons. First, because of its vagueness and hollowness, anyone can define authenticity liberally, and have the liberty to include attitudes, ethical ideals, behaviors, attitudes, or personal projects that are less virtuous. The individualistic authentic individuals who are freeing themselves of societal constraints can then easily frame morally dubious behaviors as natural manifestations of their legitimate search for authentic expression. Denying external influences is justified under the assumption that these forces are problematic, questionable, or simply interfering with the process of authentic self-

discovery. Also, embedding self-reliance, self-determination, and independence in this model has put into focus an imperative of freeing oneself of toxic influences, persons, ideas, habits, or contexts, trapping the person in this constant process of performing and co-producing authenticity in self and others. Interdependence and its corresponding mechanisms of solidarity are diluted with the help of guilt-releasing tropes: while searching for this true, authentic self, no one should feel bad, guilty, or uncomfortable with the idea of freeing themselves of anything they might find constraining or "toxic" in their lives. As a result, we see a multiplication or normalization of phenomena that would otherwise be considered uncivil or full-blown antisocial, such as ghosting (in interpersonal contexts, it refers to the decision to cut off ties with another person when the relationship is no longer "profitable" for the individual and the investment costs of maintaining it overweigh the benefits, and ending it in a more "traditional" way would incur the emotional cost or discomfort). Self-care promoters are even selling ghosting as a healthy, well-deserved ritual of "cleansing" one's social life of toxic (burdensome, undesired, uninteresting) relationships. There is one aspect of these New Age and popular psychological notions of the self that is crucial to understanding how authenticity became such a relative concept, especially in the political discourse of populist movements, as we will explain in the next part of the paper. This aspect is the idea of reinvention.

The culture of reinvention can certainly be traced back to the founding fathers, who embodied the idea of a "self-made man" as masculine ideals. These ideals, represented by Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, offer a recipe of success achieved out of nothing, through hard work, perseverance, and practical intelligence, as opposed to more European ideals proposed by the Enlightenment or Romantics, of a man tormented by ideas and crippled by doubts and anguish. Existential, humanistic psychology, positive psychotherapy, and the self-help movement all put a special emphasis on the idea that at any point in time, any individual can start anew, by first defining a new way of being and thus reinventing themselves. By being "anything they want to be", as the Queen innuendo invites believers, people can configure themselves differently starting at any moment.

Some authors go as far as supporting the idea that the political context has modeled and relentlessly advertised certain views of the self (See Adams et al. 2019). More specifically, in similar ways to Cabanas and Illouz, these authors show that psychological science, through its engagement with the neoliberal system, has modeled a concept of a self that is radically removed from its social context, the self is mainly viewed through an entrepreneurial lens as an imperative for continuous growth; conversely, this way of understanding human functioning is only reinforcing the

neoliberal system that generated them in the first place. The self-help literature and sometimes psychotherapists encourage radical changes in one's life that involve giving up unhealthy habits, "toxic circumstances" or even "toxic people" in one's life, as the only form of achieving authentic self-expression also talk about "growth pains" associated with this. The view of authenticity that is radically individualistic that it cannot be achieved other than hitting a "reset" button that severs all the "bad" connections in one's life, that stifle growth, has invented a name for the discomfort the individual has to go through to reach his dream of following his dreams and desires: "growth pains". We are promised that these pains are temporary at least for those committed to an authentic, happy life. Recent models of relational authenticity rooted in the existential tradition doubt the possibility of calling this kind of severing of ties to one's past, which contains a big part of one's narrative identity (See Gallagher et al. 2018). According to this view, the mind is embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended (4E), and the ways we are with others and for others are crucial for our self-understanding. The self is more of a collective production of meanings, narratives, and experiences of learning and in this light, authenticity is more of a dialogue in which the person negotiates his view of the self in interaction with others. Detaching from others and groups that are perceived as inhibiting one's authenticity may resemble Kierkegaard's detachment from the crowds, but there is a fundamental difference. This separation is, for the postmodern, neoliberal subject, part of a feel-good, hedonic process that is at odds with the views of the Danish philosopher.

Populism and Authenticity

All these self-care and self-enhancement trends from popular psychology and spirituality practices have spilled over into the political communication realm. In her book, *Populocracy: The Tyranny of Authenticity and the Rise of Populism*, Catherine Fieschi makes the point that authenticity is at the heart of populist political movements arising all over the Western world. However, she points out that what we are dealing with is, in fact, a skewed, perverted notion of authenticity that is advocating for a politics "rooted in instinct rather than wisdom", that is "useful (1) to brand all others as hypocrites; (2) as a blanket excuse to speak one's mind in ways that are as disruptive as possible, unbounded by received social and political norms; and (3) to make good on the populist claim that instinct and common sense trump reason and strategy" (Fieschi 2019, 36).

In her opinion, this new vision of authenticity pits reason (as a characteristic of the elites, prone to being deceiving and exploitative) against instinct, not against emotion. At its core, authenticity seeks to promote the legitimacy of the politics of the gut, against head and heart. This concept

proposed by Fieschi reflects a peculiar vision of the individual on the one hand, and the masses that they are leading and also attempting to reflect with high fidelity, on the other hand. This vision is not described in positive, idealistic, melioristic terms, but instead is rather dominated by deep, atavistic forces, and instincts, many times containing harmful consequences, implying that this is what ordinary humans are hardwired to do: being prone to follow self-interest, to lie, deceive, have shortcomings and being prone to succumbing to bad habits and indulging in all sorts of vices, with little regard to the reactions of others. Acting based on these instincts cannot be – via a naturalistic fallacy contained by this worldview – held against the individual, because it is only reflective of one's real nature, uncorrupted by empty moralistic norms and conventions. There is a sense of impunity attached to the socially desirable notion of the true, authentic, spontaneous self that individuals are entitled to in this view. Embedded in this, you have a convenient, readily accessible, and hard-to-debate excuse and/or rationalization for any bad behavior: the accusation cannot be fairly held against one, because the act that it addresses is only a manifestation or reflection of one's profound humanity. Lying upfront, openly deceiving others with a sneer and a shrug is what creates for the new populist politician the illusion of transparency, of sincerity. The more open a person is about one's shortcomings, the better. Immorality and corruption are natural consequences of acting according to one's moral constitution, thus secondary elements one can get away with as long as the relation with one's audience stays in the same transparent parameters. Speaking or acting outrageously and inciting the people to do the same in an attempt to defy the order and principles that govern a corrupt, deceiving, and manipulative elite are the factors that constitute signals of this commitment to transparency. To quote the former president of the United States addressing his followers: "All those decencies that irritate and chafe you, that you don't dare disregard? I dare. I dare for you." A perverted sense of authenticity that is a hollow concept that is inclusive of anything morally questionable is what paves this politics of shamelessness. This is why populist leaders who only talk the talk but fail to demonstrate how far they would go don't have long-lasting careers.

Populism's empty idea of authenticity strives to oppose a corrupt elite to a silent majority that struggles to make its voice heard and is looking for the perfect representatives to do it on their behalf. Disillusioned and resentful, this majority seems to wait for a leader that absolves them of their invisibility, by voicing their needs and wants, by "telling it as it is", in other words, voicing their own thoughts. To be convinced of this intention, the new populist leaders have to be able to display a radical authenticity: showing themselves as they are, warts and all, with defects or vices, like any other human. Unfortunately, this acceptance or even open embrace of one's

faults and shortcomings comes not only with moral relativism, a trivialization of otherwise unacceptable wrong acts but with a full description of immorality as a virtue. If being in the wrong is what means to be authentic, and being authentic is the goal (in opposition to the deceitful elites), that moral failings are not only expected but invited as an expression of humanity and a proof of one's bona fide. They are a sign that the person is willing to break any rule for the sake of the common good of the people, it is a measure of how far they can go to fight the elites, to display the courage that the masses allegedly lack. In other words, as long as they signal the fact that they could "sell their own mother" any day, they imply that they would go any length in the service of their supporters.

This is what populist leaders promise to their audience, a guarantee that they will embody the unrestricted urges that their followers are "too decent" to do it, which at the same time legitimizes and energizes them to do it. A promise that is both flattering and patronizing, a promise that he will do the work for them because it has what it takes: courage, persistence but also shamelessness. Shamelessness is in business contexts regarded and praised as a virtue, one that reflects incisiveness and decisiveness. He brings it into the world of politics, where tact and restraint have been the rule for decades, and where no one attempted to change the status quo of fear of not being seen as civil enough. This kind of courage is what it takes to free this world of its alleged hypocrisy, to drain the swamp, as his rhetoric goes. A Google search of the words "Trump" and "decency" results in dozens of articles weighing in on the dangerous demagoguery practiced for years in the White House but also before it became institutionalized. The effects of this continuous war against decency, which not only implies talking the talk but also walking the walk, by a full display of bigotry and shamelessness, is best witnessed with the attack of the Capitol, when riled-up mobs stormed the government building, some of them smearing feces on its walls. In a way, he did change the rules and created a push for transparency, but he unfortunately changed the tone of political debate.

Decency is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as "behavior that is good, moral, and acceptable in society". In other words, the promise of normalizing transgressions is how he motivates his supporters. Decency has been implied as a performative, calculated political performance, a staple of the corrupt elite and establishment that needs to be dismantled and, ideally, replaced by a new, transparent being. By self-indulging, Trump lets his base know that it's ok to be whatever you are, to tap into your deep resources, to transparently display your true self, in other words, authentic. Self-indulgence is a natural trait, but also a new virtue and a political communication tool to signal the bona fide (one that says something along the lines of I am just a simple human being, I am just like you, I am one of you).

Seneca's famous saying, "Errare humanum est, perseverare diabolicum" is updated in the populist model to make indecency acceptable and further, to normalize the perseveration in evil. When everything becomes part of the normal human experience, hence subjected to impunity, evil itself becomes a profoundly human, hence acceptable if not admirable quality. Persevering in evil is seen as even more essentially human than isolated acts of immoral behavior, covered as "slips" and buried under cosmetic gestures. In fact, relativizing everything puts populists in the role of impossible negotiation partners. By deciding what is wrong or right, blameworthy or not, true or false, they can ultimately get away with everything. Only forceful reactions, not logic or sensitive reasons can lead them to make concessions.

In a way, several meanings of authenticity are applied here: an illusion of consistency (a perfect overlap between external characteristics and internal beliefs and values), a sense of connection between the individual and the context, social, spatial, temporal, and a congruence between the individual's development and what is expected of him. To better understand this frame we will refer to a recently published paper that attempts to make light of the construct, at least from a psychological perspective, namely an organizational one. We choose to discuss this perspective because it contrasts both the Kierkegaardian and the Taylorist views of authenticity, at least from a few points of view.

The newly described model of the human being, prone to wrongdoing is best represented by the "warts and all" politician, who is open about his incompetence and doesn't hide behind polished appearances, discourses, and decencies. There is a true, deep, authentic people, the heart of the nation (and this is part of the populist rhetoric in several European countries but also in the United States), and there is an instinctive, natural, unspoken connection between that core/middle and the populist leaders. Aliens, foreigners but also minorities are considered incapable of grasping or accessing this essence, which is usually attached to a nation. Fieschi does not state it as such, but there is an essentialist view of authenticity that has only one hardcore: the fallibility of human nature. Coming back to Seneca's maxim, "perseverare diabolicum" is no longer seen as valid, as we witness a normalization of the perverted: what humanity is invited to admit and embrace, without getting fooled by civilizing appeals of the superior elite is the idea that persevering in mistake is profoundly human, thus tolerable. Humans, in this view, need to be accepted as beings that will perpetually be vulnerable to repeat their transgressions but at the same time able to redeem themselves. By not being transparent about their shortcomings, by virtue signaling, by imposing complex, sophisticated authoritarian tools such as the attacks of the so-called cancel culture, and the nagging constraints of political correctness, the elites are always depicted as irredeemable and manipulative. That is the populists' nemesis, the image of true evil, dressed

up in appealing clothes and wearing the mask of justice and decency; in contrast, its hero will not hide its shortcomings, even its imposture, and will fail, through repeated, owned errors. This conception of humanity pairs well with the right-wing populists' attempt to bring about any mention of their nation's or group's past sins. Holocaust denialism, denial of racism, and xenophobia are also expressions of a paradoxical embrace of a culture of perpetual possibility of reinvention, as described before in the light of self-help cultures, but also as an autonomous choice of disregarding past sins as baggage that has to weight on the present. There is no demand put on continuity, congruence, or judging individuals or nations in historical contexts. The truly "authentic people" are living unapologetically, in a perpetual here and now, defined by gut feelings and momentary whims. They do not need any of the sophistication and artificial complications of scholars and social justice warriors teaching them about historical justice.

The populist leaders find answers to problems by using their intuition, their "street smarts", by following gut feelings, and by oversimplifying. This builds a strong resistance and contempt toward anything that is characterized by detail, complexity or sophistication. The anti-intellectual, anti-scientific ethos present in most populist movements stems from and at the same time justifies exactly this view of human intelligence and success: genuine leaders and successful people have some sort of practical intelligence, they base their actions on a gut feeling that doesn't need the validation of logic, evidence, philosophical, ethical or scientific theories. The religious element is only invoked when it is seen as adequate in rejecting progressive views, such as gay marriage, reproductive rights or sexual education.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the New Age influencers or spiritual leaders that also claim profoundly moral goals attached to their strivings, but this time having less to do with loyalty to a group and keeping it intact, have a similarly mystifying theory of how we reach the truth and make decisions. For this particular category, in many instances, the path to truth is the opposite of the search for oversimplification seen in populist discourses: in their case, there is some sort of occult, impossible-to-reveal path to truth or genuine knowledge of self and society. It is its inherent complexity that makes it inaccessible to everyone. This belief paves the way to embracing the same anti-scientific attitude of populism, which is increasingly intolerant of the complexity, sophistication, and non-negotiable demands of intellectual rigor.

There are several places where the spiritual language of progressives and right-wing populism have met during the past years, in addition to this dismissal of open appeal to rational, scientific, logical explanations of phenomena and as grounds for politics: first, there is a common importance put on purity as a moral foundation, more than others, such as care/harm.

While populists see the political opponent, namely the establishment, as corrupted and hypocritical, its goal is its elimination, sometimes with little concern for the means. For the spiritual progressive movements that promote authenticity as constant individualistic construction and self-development, the purity core refers to a return to the natural, to the organic, and to the sacred. They both reside also on a combination of instinct and gut feeling when making life choices, too. In Fieschi's words: "Claims to authenticity enable populist discourse to contrast the unmediated natural intelligence or instinct of the people (who are authentic) with the acquired knowledge, book-learning, and (untrustworthy) sophistication of the elite. In this populist worldview, anyone's intimation that an issue might not be clear cut, or that hesitating might be understandable given the issue's complexity, are all taken as symptomatic of a weakness of character, and of potential corruptibility: problems need to be approached with common sense and pragmatism, and solutions should be obvious to those who have the interest of people at heart. Invoking complexity is seen as an attempt to bamboozle the people. Claims of "being right" must be the product of instinct, or they are not to be trusted. There is no room for grey areas. So, for example, emancipating one's self from the community of the nation (through travel, curiosity, hybridity, and dual identities) necessarily amounts to a rejection of the natural, unbroken, and unspoken link to the people" (2019, 37).

This connection to the natural, unbroken, and unspoken link to the people is the staple of the relational politics of authenticity. It is also the glue that binds spiritual leaders, cult leaders and gurus to their audiences. A deep connection, an unspoken, mystical relationship that is ungraspable by the human mind, that just "develops" and "happens", that just is. It also does not need legitimation from rational means. Its only epistemic validation is the "feeling of". For populists, having access to that true knowledge is about being part of the authentic people, about coming from the "deep", "authentic" nation, which is uncorrupted by education or cosmopolitanism; likewise, for the spiritual individual, it is about being an "old soul" that knows the truth when he sees it. What is specific to populism is, still, the fact that authenticity is an answer to the problem of shame and humiliation, a quick fix to solve what Michael Sandel calls the "crisis of dignity" and backlash against the tyranny of meritocracy from the less educated. Coming back to Fieschi's idea, this means that authenticity meets the role of dealing with shame and humiliation: "Speaking outrageous truths, pretending to believe them, but also speaking truth outrageously, voicing opinions that are at the very limit of taboo, all of this is about triumphing over shame – by speaking. Conquering the perceived humiliation inflicted by the elite by being, literally, shameless. Whether this is the perceived, collective humiliation of being relegated to the status of

medium-sized power; or the individual humiliation of not having the right educational credentials or cultural reference points. All these can be temporarily addressed, or rather eclipsed, by outrageously human bad behavior. In this respect, authenticity is also what "ups the ante"; it is what accounts for the sense of a spiral that leads from insinuation to accusation, to half-truth, to lie, to enormous lie, and finally, to conspiracy theory" (2019, 38-39). Fieschi masterfully explains how this hollow concept of authenticity brings the idea of a special kind of intuition that grants access to uncorrupted truths and human essence and turns it against itself. When authenticity becomes the right to express and promote lies, the term loses any ability to reflect the quality of truthfulness, being instead inhabited only by a Heideggerian nuance, that of Eigentlichkeit. The same nuance that models such as the self-determination theory of existential psychotherapy prefer: that of ownership and autonomy. Authenticity moves its meanings almost entirely to ownership, and by a blatant disregard of truth, attempts a mutation in the concept of truth itself. Actually, this is exactly what "post-truth" politics is achieving when it is trying to strip objective facts of their legitimacy in the way details of politics are discussed.

Why is it important to reclaim the meaning of authenticity and strive to restore it as a moral virtue that is not completely devoid of contents or is not free-floating? Some researchers claim that there is a mutual relationship between authenticity and moral behaviors (See Zhang et al. 2019). Their series of studies indicates that behaving morally determines people to evaluate themselves as authentic. Vice-versa, when prompted to act as their "true" selves, rather than following a rational decision-making process or thinking realistic, in other words, how they think they would act if confronted with the situation in reality, people tended to show the most unwillingness to engage in moral behaviors. However, going further than these interesting results that indicate deep and significant consequences of authenticity, we cannot observe the fact that empirical studies rely on incomplete or unconvincing definitions of authenticity. Giving authenticity substance as a psychological construct is not the point of the present article, but we need to underline the fact that we cannot rely on a body of literature that fails to offer good conceptual validity to its core element. In a recent theoretical paper, Damman, Friederichs, Lebedinski, and Liesenfeld take on the goal of describing and delivering the essence of authenticity (See Damman et al. 2020). They expand on the model proposed by Lehman and colleagues, which has three dimensions: consistency (the correspondence between the internal and external manifestations of a person, between what it is shown and their values), conformity (a correspondence between the individual and social norms) and connection (a correspondence or congruence between individual and a certain interpersonal context, in time and place) (See Lehman et al. 2019). To Lehman's model, they add

continuity, which is the correspondence between "an entity and features of development", in other words, favoring a more process perspective, to the detriment of a static one. We welcome this view and believe it is getting closer to the Kierkegardiaan concept of authenticity, and in a way, can be helpful in the attempt to operationalize it as a useful navigation tool for the Taylorist conception too.

Concluding remarks

To recap, we analyzed how, in the context of a democratization of knowledge coupled with the rise of anti-intellectual, anti-scientific social movements, authenticity evolved in several questionable ways that have started to comingle. For instance, abused as a self-help fad, promoted as a psychology superstar concept that put an exaggerated emphasis on individualistic definitions and soon became an instrument of neoliberalism, it recently turned into an influencers' asset, and even a central element of populist ideologies that currently tend to become more mainstream. We believe that authenticity's uses and abuses can generate negative outcomes, especially in adverse historical contexts, such as the present one, when the success of various forms of rhetoric can lead to extremely negative outcomes, such as catastrophic measures taken by populist leaders, successful influencers spreading conspiracy theories interfering with the control of a global pandemic, all gaining increasing support from people who actively endorse this rhetoric. The question that we need to address further is how we can reclaim back the concept of authenticity from the abuses we discussed. We tend to follow Taylor in emphasizing the fact that even when we see it as a personal, individualistic standard, we cannot separate the understanding of an authentic life in the absence of the ideal of a good life, one that comes with responsibilization. This responsibilization means questioning one's ideals, convictions, or even ethical principles, and the implied eventuality of changing them, in light of new facts, events, or self-discovery. These cannot be done, of course, in the absence of an ethical set of rules that is socially situated. In Kierkegaard's terms, it is an attitude of perpetual questioning of one's own deepest creeds and commitments.

We are at this point indebted to answer how can Kierkegaard's account of authenticity save the present age from the hollow versions of it: an individualistic pursuit characterized by a hedonic search for an erratic self, with no moral commitments, other than to oneself, namely building and enforcing boundaries of the self; an allegedly self-transcending authenticity that represents committing to mystifying spiritual practices or adheres to nationalistic agendas and identities that enclose the individual in a tribal mindset. What is unique to Kierkegaard's view of authenticity is what might operate as an antidote to the empty promises of a contemporary popular

understanding of it: a provocative attitude towards self-construction, one of skepticism and continuous questioning.

Any quest for authenticity should depend on perpetually asking oneself: How does my project of self-transformation include a reflective and responsible attitude on its effects on the larger social context? Can I suspect my project to be only following a hollow ideological prescription that seems to be purely performative, with an aesthetic, superficial self-expressive appeal, that might just neutralize dissent or perform the role of technology of what is, in the words of Kierkegaard, leveling? While trying to find and embody a true, deep self, individuals might, in fact, succumb to a culturally prescribed phenomenon, thus spending all their energies serving the perpetuation of structural, socio-economic ills. In the era of widespread mindfulness practice and an obsession with well-being that replaces religious rituals, authenticity sounds more like the silencing of the mind and calming the seeds of dissent, reminding us of the description Kierkegaard provided us in *The present age*: "Whereas a passionate age accelerates, raises up and overthrows, elevates and debases, a reflective apathetic age does the opposite, it stifles and impedes, it levels. Leveling is a quiet, mathematical, abstract enterprise that avoids all agitation" (Kierkegaard 2000, 258). In a way, it pacifies by keeping people engaged in immediacy.

In the so-called post-truth era, the account of authenticity most widely present in the popular discourse proposes an ideal individual that resembles the image of Don Juan from Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. The individual who refuses to look back to his own actions and implicitly refuses to reflect on them, to identify his commitments and measure his actions against them, then reconsider his goals or means based on this reflection. In this way, he is always seeking to be someone else, someone new, in search of something else, and new gratifications. Maximizing his pleasure seems to be his only commitment, his neophilia his guiding value, and a life philosophy that denigrates regret, being apologetic or condoning the pressure to think about the common good. Confronted with his misdeeds, he immediately plays the victim. Relationships and any other form of engagement (like professional or spiritual ones) are only important and nurtured as long as they provide instant gratification, satisfy the need for interestingness and novelty, and then are severed the moment they stop providing any personal benefit. He does not search for any depth or meaning in his existential adventures, because the sense of coherence is not important. Repetition, just like coherence, is dismissed, and disguised in ethical commitments, like a need to look for personal improvement or reformation. Starting anew, coming clean is only reflecting the opposite of what it looks. Instead of redemption, it serves the rejection of the past, especially of its sinful aspects.

Promoting the ideal of a life lived in aesthetic immediacy like Don Juan, and selling it as an ethical ideal makes way for new virtues: being relentlessly

shameless, self-indulgent, unapologetic, unrestrained, non-attached and non-committed to any standard or relationship. Sporadically, there will be some self-transcending goals or commitments, that examined closely, are either ghosts or chimeras. These nonbinding commitments can be anything, from finding one's natural spirit, and connecting to the true soul of a nation or motherland, to being one with an omnipotent, universal power. The role of these null or inoperative commitments in the way to one's authentic, true, deep self, is to confuse and divert the attention from the truth: the only loyalty is for oneself (and, sometimes, the tribe). Freedom is read in its most individualistic definition, as libertinism, and exclusion of the other. This lack of restraint and commitment is what allows the post-truth individual, and Don Juan, to live in the horizon of infinite possibilities. What Kierkegaard reminds us among the empty promises of authenticity coming from the "happiness industry" and influencers is that there is no easy answer or easy fix to life's challenges and the burden of freedom. While this industry advocates for a light, gentle, painless way, Kierkegaard tells us that anxiety is here to show us the path, pulling us from the crowd and opening the way towards the authenticity we crave. In this paper, we invited the reader to weigh the benefits against the risks of choosing the feel-good path of commodified authenticity.

Notes

[1] We touched the problem of the instrumental relations between people and other postmodern phenomenon which affect existential authenticity in Bârliba (2020).

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Ștefan GHIRAN [*]

To the Stars and Back Among Earthlings: An Exploration of Science Fiction Women Writers from Mary Shelley to Ursula K. LeGuin

Abstract: The present paper aims to trace the feminine and feminist presence in science fiction literature since its commonly accepted beginning, following several examples of women authors who through their work managed to capture the essence of change, to challenge the norm and to even give viable alternatives to what centrality meant in their respective times. If science fiction is a genre of alternatives, different futures or new beginnings, then the parallels with feminism as a current, literary, cultural, and even philosophical, are inescapable. In various stages, the works and concepts analyzed below present blueprints of social contexts and cultural milieus which mediate conversations around the notions of gender, equality, and representation, just as valid and relevant today as at the time of their writing.

Keywords: science fiction, feminism, cultural studies, thought experiment, intersectionality, interdisciplinarity.

> *We decided, therefore, that the striking coherence we noticed in literature by women could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society.* (Gilbert & Gubar 1979, xi-xii)

Rarilh [rɑrɫ] is a word in Láadan, a constructed language designed to express the life experiences of women, which encodes the concept behind the drive of feminist literary researchers during the 1970s and 1980s. It defines the feeling which moved Elaine Showalter to make reparations for the western world's literature in 1977 with *A Literature of Their Own,* or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1979 with *The Madwoman in the Attic.*

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Less known and three years earlier than Showalter's now seminal work, in 1974 Pamela Sargent is moved by the same motivation to put together the first number of an anthology, *Women of Wonder: Science-fiction Stories by Women about Women.* By 1983 there was still a need for addressing this issue, as Joanna Russ writes *How to Suppress Women's Writing,* a carefully curated selection of opinions about women and women's writing in a patriarchal context from both literature and criticism existent at the time. This tradition, thus started, never stopped and is now carried on by scholars such as Lisa Yaszek and her *The Future Is Female!* with its second volume published in 2022 .

Rarilh has the following definition in Suzette Haden Elgin's *Dictionary of Láadan*: "to deliberately refrain from recording; for example the failure throughout history to record the accomplishments of women [ra=non- + ri= to record, keep records + lh=negative connotation]" (Elgin 1985). As the definition suggests, the word is not limited to women's achievements, it refers to any and all history or events consciously unrecorded or deleted from the record with evil intent. The present discussion, however, will necessarily bring into focus only the example given by Elgin, the creator of this language, in the dictionary and even narrow it down to the achievements of women in Science Fiction literature written in English in an attempt to highlight the common pleas of both the genre and the women's movement. Further, it may also add to the proof of the undeniable mark women left on the genre, shifting it into what it is today. The metamorphosis of the genre from pulp to the "space opera" of the incipient years to the complex experimental tool good science fiction can be today is neither uniform, nor complete as the authors engaging with it are not part of a breed of hive minded creatures bent on taking over the world — an image of antagonists very often met in SF stories of all times — nor is it final. They are as diverse as the topics they propose and thus the genre continues to evolve with every generation. Finally, this change is not owed exclusively to the intervention of women, yet women did play a major role in opening eyes and literary doors and that is precisely what will be analyzed henceforth.Until the restorationist work of the mid 70s to the 80s, history was usually quick to asses that most great writers were men up until a point, or that science fiction was written by men and for men almost exclusively. As such, in Elaine Showalter's words:

> "Having lost sight of the minor novelists, who were the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next, we have not had a very clear understanding of the continuities in women's writing, nor any reliable information about the

relationship between the writer's lives and the changes in the legal, economic and social status of women." (Showalter 2020, 7)

The following section will attempt to highlight some of those links that are certainly there, albeit hardly seen in science fiction, and in doing so, build on the now rich tradition of *écriture féminine*. While indeed fewer women than men wrote in this field, they are by no means few and they truly wrote themselves into their texts in such a seamless way, as if pre-echoing what Helene Cixous would write a century and more later: "I write woman: woman must write woman" and again, "she must write herself, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (Cixous 880). Before proceeding with the chronicle of some of the texts unearthed by these venerable literary archaeologists, one more mention must be made regarding the meaning of women's writing. The definition of this notion must be extended here to adapt to these times of proto-science fiction and protofeminism, and at least for its beginning it must mean "literature by women", not necessarily feminist or reactionary literature in which these women pioneered their tradition as their imagination was not limited to – nor by literary criticism simply because there was no theoretical framework for any at the time. The first text predates the periods Elaine Showalter coins as "*Feminine, Feminist* and *Female*" and, as we will see, it resists classification in either period, enforcing *avant la lettre* Showalter's conclusion to her own system, that "these are obviously not rigid categories, distinctly separable in time" (Showalter 2020, 13). Since it does not deal with roles in society, or anything having to do with women really, it may be overlooked altogether by feminist readers, yet it does offer a powerful example of a woman who made her voice heard, created history and more, drew the blueprint for at least two distinct literary genres, science fiction and horror.

The Beginnings of a Tradition

In 1818, at the time of the publication of *Frankenstein; or, The New Prometheus*, feminism was but the seedling of an idea, albeit it a known and very strong one in the heart, mind, and pen of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley's mother, and her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), but fairly obscure and ignored by the society not involved in the early suffrage movement. Even though according to some critics Shelley did not share her mother's progressive views in full, she does manage to put herself in her writing, as she created a text which deviates from the norm in some key

aspects consistent with what later came to be the science fiction "thought variant". In the preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, she recounts the process of creating the work. She writes of her early attempts at stories as a child: "I was not confined to my own identity, and I could people the hours with creations far more interesting to me at that age than my own sensations" (Wollstonecraft Shelley 2017, 292), indicating that the literary legacy she inherited from both her patents helped her experiment with worlds outside her immediate tangible existence. Further, she makes a point of presenting her husband as the main proponent of her literary career and the one who persuaded her to return to stories written. It was while traveling with him that she got the idea for *Frankenstein*. Of the work itself she makes two mentions that draw the attention of the modern reader and place her in both main lines analyzed in this chapter. During the visit they paid Lord Byron in Switzerland: "many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener" (Wollstonecraft Shelley 2017, 293). One of these conversations, regarding reanimation based on some of Erasmus Darwin's research, was the spark which ignited her imagination, yet the last clarification regarding her near silence is the indication that she was not a Victorian subservient woman. Including it when she could have just as well left this detail out, inevitably draws attention to the fact that even though she had been invited and encouraged to write, while the men were debating science, she remained a "nearly silent listener". It is simply an extra layer added to her creativity and determination. Both Byron and Shelley were poets and philosophers, not scientists, thus perhaps knew as much about Darwin and Galvani as she did and from the same publications to which she undoubtedly had unrestrained access. This view is supported by a second mention: "I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, not scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband" (Wollstonecraft Shelley 2017, 294) making it clear that she claims full authorship and originality of the material. This may have been prompted by various opinions appeared between the original publication of the novel in 1818 and the one prefaced by these words in 1931, otherwise again, she would not have felt the need to clarify this particular aspect. She continues by crediting her husband with what he was owed, namely: "yet but for his incitement, [the work] would never have taken the form in which it was presented. From this declaration I must except the preface [to the first edition]. As far as I can recollect, it was entirely written by him" (Wollstonecraft Shelley 2017, 294). This is a woman who claims what is hers and who freely speaks her mind in writing.

With this in mind, one must approach *Frankenstein* as the first work of science fiction in recorded literature. Just as important is that a woman very certain of her value wrote it. A simple argument can be made as an answer to those who read *Frankenstein* through its historical confines alone, rendering the author's achievement as something coincidental. Indeed, the text seems to be a warning at first glance: "Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (Wollstonecraft Shelley 2017, 31). Seeing it as a reaction to technology and radicalism is a trap of appearance easily fallen into, however. It is a warning, but of a different kind. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was herself an educated woman, daughter of two established writers and thinkers, married to another. Such a member of the British intelligentsia could not have militated against the "acquirement of knowledge". Moreover, Shelley endowed the Creature with the full range of humanity: love, language, empathy, sorrow, with desire for love, hope, regret, all perfectly represented in full through the final monologue:

Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal (Wollstonecraft Shelley 2017, 142).

The monster then, who had acquired knowledge himself, must stand for more than simply the evil of societal and industrial advancement. Finally, the creature was not punished with destruction, she let him live. Though the novel does end with his solemn promise of self destruction, Walton, who through the entirety of the text serves as the eye witness validating Victor Frankenstein's wild scientific claims, does not validate the final, most important one, that of anti-creation. This alone should serve as proof that *Frankenstein* is not an elaborate fable fearing technology and that Shelley does not imitate the conservative views of her time, but that instead she invites a conversation, albeit a monstrous one. In excluding the undeniable proof of the reversal of creation, she uses her own voice to pose a rather difficult question which the reader is prevailed upon to answer — whether or not the creature kept his promise. From the comfort of the postmodern, posthuman history, Frankenstein's creature may be seen as a victim in search of a humanity he can never attain because of the shortcomings of his creator. The creature did not ask to be brought into the world and was not given any tools for learning how to live, was not given

any love or mere care. The postmodern reader is compelled to wonder how the story would unfold if he had had all of these.

What Mary Shelley did was to blend the gothic with something new, something full of awe at the time, the creation of life in a new fashion — through technology. Certainly it was not new for humanity to desire to emulate godhood and the ultimate enactment of this desire is that of creation, the power over life itself. Stories about promethean humans, necromancers, golems and other (re)animated lifeforms date before Frankenstein's Creature and in many different cultures around the globe, yet all was done through magic or alchemy. What is novel here is that Victor Frankenstein tames the power of the thunder with the help of electrodes, in line with contemporary discoveries. Along with these discoveries however, Frankenstein's creature does indeed reflect the anxieties of its society in regards to the new and rapid technological development. What has been proven above is that this anxiety is not merely approached with fear, but with a sense of responsibility which aptly and perhaps ironically named Victor and his newly acquired power over life, lack, and for this he is punished. The subtle shift in understanding the complexity of the text is made possible because Mary Shelley allowed for it by nuancing her characters, not merely stopping at sheer shock value and the desire to scare. It was because she wrote herself in the text as she wrote a theme vastly different than the mainstream literature of her time and completely free from any confines, bringing the available science they had to life.

If during her time such scenarios as that of *Frankenstein* would be placed in the realm of horror fiction, Shelley herself confessing she wanted to write a scary story in the preface of the 1831 edition, reading this story today no longer scares its readers, in appearance at least, as humanity takes pride in having overcome such early, perhaps superstitious and incomplete depictions of technology. In reality however, the paradox of wishing to create life and fearing the new creation or its possible rise against its creator is more present today than ever. What started as an electrically risen monster who slowly gained sentience by mimicking its surroundings, transformed into the androids of the 1950s stories which are a very near reality today. Its sentience has turned today into the software capable of processing unthinkable amounts of information and into the artificial intelligence which learns by emulation, more intelligent and autonomous than ever. Both mirror what Mary Shelley presented and warned against more than two hundred years ago. Contemporary science fiction still tries to answer her question by looking at human creation in all its possible and impossible aspects.

The next two works presented were written by multi-genre writers, contributors to pulp magazines, as science fiction did not solidify itself as a field until the late 1920s, nor was scientific accuracy sought after at the time:

Much early American science fiction, written for the pulps, concentrated on adventure involving larger-than-life characters. There was usually a minimum of scientific accuracy; many stories were actually closer to fantasy than science fiction. (Sargent 1979, xix).

Among their merits however, was to form and inform the generations which refined the art of scribing science into fiction much like Mary Shelley. The end of the 19th century is a time when more women joined the ranks of writers for pay, satisfying Showalter's condition for the focus of her study. But if in the Victorian era she feels that "the novelists publicly proclaimed, and sincerely believed, their antifeminism. By working in the home, by preaching submission and self-sacrifice, and by denouncing female self-assertiveness, they worked to atone for their own will to write" (Showalter 2020, 21), there is no such sense in the writers of pulps, specifically those precursor to science fiction. It seems that since before its beginning, this genre attracted women who wished to explore society in a way that the regular canon would not allow. Not all women did, yet among them there are those who would see things differently and do so in print. The narrators and main characters are still male most of the time but the authors find ways towards fine and sometimes subtle, sometimes very direct criticism to the state of facts in American fiction during this time.

Elizabeth Croom Bellamy, a novelist dealing with a variety of social topics in different genres, wrote towards the end of the 19th century. One of her stories however, "Ely's Automatic Housemaid" (1899), deals with science and starts with a positive account of what science can do, even if by the end it shifts its tone into a veritably sarcastic one. This positivism came to characterize many of the science fiction stories of the 1920s, where technology was mostly seen as a convenience and any problem that might ensue would be solved through the wit or the sheer power of will of the male protagonist. As the title suggests, it deals with veritable fully mechanical proto-androids *avant la lettre* who serve the household. These machines are not yet sentient nor fully autonomous, that is, they only function via input by their operator and towards a given task, they cannot make their own decisions outside of that, thus they are an early iteration of robotic servants. In terms of science, there is little explained beyond their description:

My friend's invention was shaped in the likeness of the human figure with body, head, arms, legs, hands and feet. It was clad in waterproof cloth, with a hood of the same to protect the head, and was shod with felt. The trunk contained the wheels and springs, and in the head was fixed the electric battery. The face, of bisque, was described as possessing 'a very natural and pleasing expression'. (Bellamy 2019, 65)

A few other components are mentioned here and there, yet the focus of these stories was hardly scientific accuracy; that was to come some twenty years later with Hugo Gernsback's editorship. It instead offers a humorous account of these human-like figures who fail in their tasks precisely because they could not possibly think for themselves. Beyond using some futuristic scientific entertainment, Bellamy also infuses the story with a sense of her societal *status quo*. The male first person narrator makes the account all the more delightful as it is written by a woman with the expectation that a husband may have in mind:

Harrison Ely is one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen. He has invented an 'Automatic-Electric Machine-Servant.' My wife said 'Oh!' There was not an atom of enthusiasm in that 'Oh!' but I was not to be daunted.
[...]
'Ah!' said my wife; and the enthusiasm that was lacking in the 'Oh!' made itself eloquent in that 'Ah!' 'What is the price?' she asked again. (Bellamy 2019, 66)

This short dialogue between spouses shows the keen eye of the author in matters social and familial, and more, the obvious sarcasm exposes the fact that the author was part of a generation determined to obtain equality and suffrage. Another element in support of this claim is that in such a science oriented story, the author plays within the trope of men getting excited about technological advancements while women are passive and uninterested. Written by a woman, it becomes a playful critique, all the more so when the man is just as lost and scared when dealing with the machines as the woman is, not playing the usual role of the savior. Finally, the two "Electric-Automatic Household Beneficent Geniuses", in short E.A.H.B.G. or simply B.G. by their official factory label, get women's names, Bridget and Juliana, both the names of former hired servants of the family. Naming what is basically a sophisticated appliance designed to do house chores is another statement meant to further stir the conversation of gender roles. The robotic B.G.s, a very subtle stand-in for Bridget and Juliana (the sound formation for "J" here is the same as the one in "genius", the [dʒ] sound), are clearly non-gendered thus the names could have been

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neutral, but naming them based on their function around the household effectively forces the reader to acknowledge the tradition which constrains women into the role of the maid and that of a wife. Yet a deeper layer of criticism that can be extrapolated from this event is that the two B.G.s having no autonomy whatsoever, cannot have any input or opinion about the names they are given, they can only mechanically proceed to fulfill their tasks. Thus the text read by a signee of the *Declaration of Sentiments* fifty years prior to this story, would be able to contextualize it as social commentary, not just mere scientific-literary experiment.

Another story, more overtly challenging such traditions and the oppression of women is an earlier one, from 1892. Lillie Devereux Blake, a well known suffragette at the end of the 19th century and the president of the New York State Woman's Suffrage Association between 1879 and 1890 (Ashley 2015) wrote "A Divided Republic", a separationist utopian story where all women of the Old Colonies move to the West, beyond the Appalachians, with the mountain chain functioning as a natural border between the sexes. This story deals more with this speculative element than science fiction, yet it must be mentioned here specifically on account of it presenting such a divide while the suffrage movement was in full motion. It presents women as being ignored, disregarded and discredited in all matters political and social. Not only that, but no merits are credited by the men of their society: "Matters began actually to grow worse for women. The more honors they carried off at college the less were they allowed to hold places of public trust or given equal pay for equal work" (Blake 1892). They resolve to peacefully solve the issue for themselves and after a continental convention they leave and settle in "not Wyoming and Washington alone, but Idaho and Montana, and all the region between the two enfranchised territories" (Blake 1892) which they swiftly turn into a truly functioning society. They take on the jobs which men would have normally done with ease, they pass laws, they invest in education, they build railroads, in short, they thrive. Meanwhile, the society of men in the East falls apart due to unruly behavior, drunkenness, lack of care and a completely askew list of priorities, most of which have to do with entertainment, violent more often than not, and leisure time. When the situation gets too dire to stand, they concede to meet with the women and agree to their terms for return. Equal pay, the right to any official position, turning military facilities into schools, women will control liquor sales and more importantly, universal suffrage thus becomes the norm in this new America and all live happily ever after. A rather unexpected ending when it comes to such a utopian story though it may be, it does clearly state the position suffragist women had regarding

their belief in what society might look like should they be listened to. The story then becomes a reimagining of an American society which suffered because a vast portion of its population was not heard. This story is at once part of and precursor to many such utopian/dystopian reimaginings throughout the history of science fiction literature written by women, a subgenre blurring the lines between science fiction and speculative fiction, much associated with women's literature of the time.

Of course, utopias are not the only framework employed by women writers. By 1995 several large anthologies presenting more than seventy years of literary tradition (1920s to 1990s) and edited by both women and men have been dedicated to women writers in science fiction since Sargent's first *Women of Wonder.* All of them show tremendous diversity in themes, approach, style — in short, a literary world of one's own. To name a few of the earlier ones, Sargent herself published four editions in the *Women of Wonder* series between 1974 and 1995. Vonda McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson published *Aurora: Beyond Equality* in 1976 and Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* in 1985. Sargent provides lists of further readings in three of her anthologies, but specifically in the last one, *Women of Wonder: The Contemporary Years,* covering the period between 1979 and 1993, she amasses around 340 titles comprising short stories, novels, novelettes, collected works and omnibusses, belonging to more than 140 women authors. She specifies that: "No ideological yardstick was used to measure these works; although they are all by women, some do not reflect a feminist sensibility" (Sargent 1995, 405), which is an important point for the entirety of the conversation focused around building a "feminine tradition" in science fiction - undoubtedly there is one, and it is rich.

If the 19th century saw such literature by women somewhat overlooked it was "because the first generation of pulp magazines that appeared in the 1890s, including *All-Story Weekly* and the *Black Cat*, were also multi-genre magazines targeting and featuring women writers" (Yaszek and Sharp 2016, xix). Works like "Divided Republic" were few among many romances, adventures and other ways literary expression was present in short form in these publications. Later on, when the pulps started transforming into science-oriented magazines, "more than 450 known women published SF in professional and amateur venues between 1926, when Hugo Gernsback created the first dedicated SF magazine, and 1945, when the end of World War II ushered in a new constellation of practitioners and periodicals" (Yaszek and Sharp 2016, xvii). According to Sargent, the numbers represent between 10 and 20 percent of the authors,

and other critics agree that these percentages are definitory for the presence of women in the field since its inception and until the 70s. A consequence of such a timid presence, during its first years at least, is that "most sf has been conservative in its depiction of future roles for women or has ignored them altogether" (Sargent 1978, xiv). Thus, since they did not get representation, there was very little to attract women to the genre. This was accounted for in several ways, one of which being that science is the domain and dominion of the man, not the woman, and by extrapolation, "that science fiction was basically a man's (or boy's) genre was not entirely true, yet it was also not entirely false" (Sargent 1978, xxiii). Somehow, it was made to be a boys' genre by attitudes towards girls' activities and questioning women's ability to write and understand scientific, or indeed utopian, devices. Hugo Gernsback encouraged women to write for his publications: "In 1927, just one year after he founded *Amazing*, Gernsback regretfully noted that women rarely made good SF authors, because their science education was all too often 'limited' by social convention" (Yaszek and Sharp 2016, xix). While this seems merely an observation based in his own reality, it shows what that reality was like, and more, that few would in fact do anything about the limitations of this social convention. Another example which also shows that not enough had changed by the 1970s comes from Gérard Klein, the French author and critic whom Joanna Russ quotes in *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. In talking about Ursula K LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* and *The Left Hand of Darkness,* he "attributes LeGuin's artistic success to her nurturant qualities [...] the fact that her art is the product of 'a happily resolved childhood, an active feminine genitality, and her intellectual indebtedness to her historian husband'" (qtd in Russ 2005, 162).

While this may be classified as textbook psychoanalytic criticism to some extent, it is extremely reductionist in that, according to this logic, a woman may only be successful if certain conditions outside her are met. Therefore the analysis clearly moved away from the quality and the artistic value of the work itself and presented the lens through which the critic superimposed values other than those the work itself yields. While looking for the innovative but denying that it could be attained, or alternatively, suggesting that when found, its merits are solely due to external factors, some of which might be construed as insulting to the artist, one admits one's own limitations by various conventions, not only social, but cultural, educational, etc. Russ goes on on to conclude that "even a critic looking for new values recognizes them best when he can mistake them for old values, especially the old values for which he himself has a sentimental regard"

(Russ 2022, 162). This bias confirmation is one of the reasons SF has been seen as an exclusive "boy's genre" from its beginning well into what came to be "The New Wave". Despite all this however, Gernsback did publish works by women even before SF solidified itself and

"continued this practice in his genre magazines. Moreover, he encouraged authors to draw on literary traditions that had long been popular with women writers, including utopian and Gothic fiction, and women easily adapted his conception of SF as a vehicle for scientific inspiration in order to explore how the genre might also serve as a vehicle for social change." (Yaszek and Sharp 2016, xix)

He understood that society, with all its facets and complexities can become clearer if its many voices shape its image. As a result, here are a few more examples continuing the tradition already briefly presented in the first part of the chapter, this time from the beginning of the Science Fiction era, between the years 1920 and 1960, that show how the genre did in fact benefit once women made their voices heard.

Francis Stevens is a virtual household name, having contributed regularly in this period. *The Heads of Cerberus,* published in 1919 in *The Thrill Book*, a pulp magazine, is her most acclaimed work. Besides this, it is also often seen as the first known science fiction novel to deal with and elaborate on parallel dimensions "in which it is assumed that there are parallel worlds which have developed differently from our own as a result of different choices, circumstances and historical developments" (Sargent 1995, xviii). The work deals with a parallel Philadelphia two hundred years in the future (2118) where the main characters, Robert Drayton, Terence Trenmore, and Viola Trenmore arrive and have to deal with a totalitarian regime. Women also claim the first cyborg in science fiction literature. Catherine Lucille Moore, writing as C.L. Moore, another one of the most prolific early SF writers both in the beginning and its "Golden Age", wrote "No Woman Born" for John Campbell's *Astounding* in 1944.

"Its heroine, a dancer named Deirdre, has her brain transplanted into a metal body after she is nearly killed in a fire. The problems of Deirdre's adjustment to this body are sensitively portrayed; at the story's conclusion, we realize that Deirdre will have many difficulties and that there is a possibility she may become estranged from other humans. But Deirdre is aware of these problems and may, the reader can hope, overcome them; Moore leaves this possibility open." (Sargent 1995, xx)

As such, besides the work dealing with technological advancements that would allow for such a transplant, still impossible today, Moore also deals extensively with human adaptation to that new metal body, preparing

the way for similar discussions in SF works several decades later. A deeper reading also yields another poetic reading of such a story since Deirdre explains why it is important that she keep practicing her art even with such a body since this is the only way in which she can maintain "her contact with humanity through dance" (Sargent 1995, xix). By extrapolation, art then becomes the milieu that keeps humanity afloat in an increasingly mechanized and metallic world. Leslie F. Stone, an author know for "The Conquest of Gola", is the one who wrote the "first woman astronaut, the frist black SF hero, and the first alien civilization to win a war against humans" (Yaszek 2018). Of her work, Lisa Yasek and Patrick Sharp write that:

"Fans debated the merits of Stone's action- packed but socially provocative stories in the letters pages of the early SF magazines, and at least one such fan — a young man named Isaac Asimov—was so inspired by her 1936 story 'The Human Pets of Mars' that he 'decided to try, for the very first time, [writing] science fiction'." (Yaszek and Sharp 2016, xvii)

Claire Winger Harris, the first woman to contribute a science fiction work in *Amazing Stories* (the first dedicated science fiction magazine) is also among the first authors to "consider the idea of an augmented human" (Ashley 2015) by means of artificial organs. Not yet a complete and complex autonomous cyborg as Moore's Deirdre, but a human and more advanced version of Bellamy's fully mechanical housemaids. She is also the first author to offer a list of sixteen "Possible Science Fiction Plots" (Yaszek 2018) in an article with the same title, published in *Wonder Stories* in 1933, thus offering a framework for both the genre and what was to become literary criticism for the field. Many of these, either already were or became fixtures of SF, still remaining as such today. Criticism at the time was being shaped to great extent by editorials, authors/contributors, and fan feedback.

One can conclude that it is with and through them that the change of pace started and moved from action-adventure stories (space-operas), to a more attentive literature. As they were still very much part of the "pulp" era, however, they were "less interested in sentence-by-sentence literariness than in big *what if* questions and the seemingly boundless imaginative possibilities of futures to come and collaboratively broke all sorts of new generic ground, trying out speculative themes that now seem basic elements in American culture" (Yaszek 2018). This did not prevent them from experimenting however, and as we have seen, a definite legacy can be traced through this undercurrent that is women's contribution to the field of

science fiction. It challenges, creates, experiments, contradicts, sometimes the status quo, other times the senses, but most importantly, it finds questions and possibilities for all readers to ponder and answer themselves, questions which ultimately push the field out of its comfort zone, into the unknown. More, as Pamela Sargent suggests, and much of the cultural import from the United States confirms: "Science fiction, or notions derived from it, can create the relevant myths of our age. Thus the literature shapes attitudes toward future possibilities even in the minds of those who have not read it" (Sargent 1979, xiii). This is particularly relevant for the next period even more so than for the one just discussed.

Towards the Literary Thought Experiments

It is in the 1960s that the personal truly became recognized as political in all walks of American life and the field of science fiction was not exempt from this new development. The genre, already in existence for more than three decades, with a significant volume of constant contributors, had established itself firmly within the American mind. Helmed by visionary editors and pushed ever forward to the outer reaches of human imagination by writers, a lot of whom had been avid fans or contributors to the readers columns, it inevitably became visible in the mainstream and thus taken seriously. If inklings of progress in themes were already seen in the previous generations, this is the time when style became of major interest for readers, editors and writers alike. It is also the time when this literature moved from outer to the inner space of the mind and the psyche, and more authors became concerned not solely with how technology facilitates the ease of human lifestyle, but how it influences one's thought processes. Editor John W. Campbell "insisted that his writers think seriously about the ideas and devices used in their fiction, and that they pay attention to the implications of scientific ideas and advanced technology" (Sargent 1979, xix). However, this period considered by many the greatest in the larger history of science fiction, suffered as "the feature most distinctive of science fiction — the fictional development of possible future worlds using ideas derived from physical, biological, and social sciences — was the one most undeveloped" (Sargent 1979, xxxvii). Of this period editor and writer Judith Merril remarks: "my God, how the stories rolled out! [...] the sad fact is that with all but a few, remembering them is better than rereading them" (Merril 2017, 33), the reason being that they were trying to fit a story in a mold that could not quite hold it. The result was that until the new generation of writers came along to shape the field, it remained "in the

special form in which it had existed for thirty years moribund" (Merril 2017, 36). However, Campbell's great merit, as Merril acknowledges it, is that his

"*engineering* frame of mind [...] he had a broader concept of the scope of 'science' (technology and engineering); he wanted to explore the effects of the new technological wold on people. Cultural anthropology, social psychology, cybernetics, communications, sociology, education, psychometrics - all these, and a dozen intermediate points, were thrown open for examination" (Merril 2017, 32).

The result was not just a broadening of scope, but of ideas, and for this reason it was not until the 60s that SF became categorized as "sociological" and a "thought experiment". An alchemy of scientific, social, cultural and literary elements had to ensue so that the mold would cast an image as complete and close to the desired one as possible. Women writers, empowered by the civil rights movements and the literary tradition explored above, were able to redefine science alongside science fiction, and freely, but methodically experimented with the social, the cultural, and the political. It is during this time that "there are more female writers entering the field than ever before, though they are still outnumbered by men" (Sargent 1978, xxiii). In Judith Merril's words,

"[by technology] I do *not* mean machines, and I do *not* mean 'hardware' — artifacts. I mean useful constructs derived from scientific concepts, but not requiring scientific training or understanding to use. Geometry is part of our technology and so is algebra — and so is symbolic logic, and so are the 'tools' of psychometrics — and the less generally tangible tools of psychoanalysis." (Merril 2017, 34)

Technology thus became method and this method could be applied to sciences other than the traditionally "hard" ones. Women writers who were part of this revolution applied such scientific methods of analysis in their works, and turned "soft" sciences, like linguistics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, in short humanities, into fine-tuned instruments of measuring the development of future cultures while at the same time turning the readers eyes towards their very own cultures and selves. The hard core of science fiction became centered around a soft umbrella of science.

One of the reasons for establishing a literary tradition for an *écriture feminine* in SF prior to this conversation was not only that of establishing a framework but of demonstrating that the beginning of one was already in place from well before the New Wave, before what came to be the

"feminist science fiction" of the last part of the 20th century. Women writers had dealt with such ideas from Victorian times. Perhaps Showalter does not refer to any of the authors presented in the first section when she says that "to many of [Mill's] contemporaries (and to many of ours), it seemed that the nineteenth century was the Age of the Female Novelist" (Showalter 2020, 3), but they were certainly there and part of it. A pattern thus becomes inescapable comparing the impact and presence of what is usually perceived as a minority of writers in the two literary ages, a hundred years apart, one of the "Female Novelist" and one where "the most interesting new writers of science fiction are women" (Sargent 1978, xxiii).

One great, if harrowing example of such a thought experiment is James Tiptree Jr.'s (Alice Sheldon) "The Girl Who Was Plugged In", the tragic account of seventeen year old P. Burke who suffered from pituitary dystrophy. Set in a future where technology advanced so far as to be able to recreate the (inanimate) human body entirely, one would think that cures for such a minor affliction, by comparison, would be found. Yet that was not the case, and the girl suffers from depression derived from the social stigma hormonal imbalances inflict upon her to the point that she tries to end her life and fails. This action is illegal and while under arrest she is presented with the opportunity to control, remotely, one such body, built to perfection, with all the marketable qualities one could ask for and P. Burke did not posses. "Marketable" because she becomes a sales agent for major companies who run a reality show around her new body, in which they add careful product placement around the globe. She is described as ugly, monstrous, a hulk, while the girl she is to be the brain and soul for is minion, beautiful with refined features. Once the remote consciousness connection is established, she lives her life through the body of another, moving it, talking through it, being appreciated and even loved by those around her, yet not being able to feel anything tactile, to taste food to experience anything physical. P. Burke stands for Philadelphia Burke, out of which the creators of the "husk" she mentally inhabits choose Delphi for their creation as if to remove the last shadow of love (*phileo*) the tormented Burke has. This parallel shows the depths of dissociation she goes through while erasing her own previous self and becoming another person. The story is one which in appearance is a cold, account of an uncanny event. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar say that "forty years ago, we'd have considered it a tale of the madwoman in the computer [...] for, deploying a macho style, Tiptree writes this story slangily without any indication of sympathy for the two-in-one heroines" (Gilbert and Gubar 2021, 192). However, on closer inspection, it is a profound analysis of societal pressure

which pushes the ones it considers "others" to extremes. From Delphi's perspective, who towards the end of the story starts showing signs of sentience, it is a critique on the pressure created by the requirement of perfection, where conforming and achieving societal standards forces the individual to shut down/break down. It is also a critique brought to what beauty is in the media, the harsh and uncaring language used can be a veiled commentary to the effects of the male gaze, adding to the grotesque of the projected reality P. Burke lives in without experiencing it fully, although she is in full control of Delphi's actions. She merely perceives it on an intellectual level. Another interpretation may be extrapolated paralleling P. Burke's need to present herself as something other than what she was to society, with the author's pseudonym(s), under which she wrote most of her major stories. In order to afford to write "macho" and present such profoundly feminine experience in an unique way she had to use a male pseudonym.

Another example may be found in Joanna Russ' "When It Changed". It presents a planet, Whileaway, a far terran colony where men died due to an unknown plague that killed only the male of the species. As all colonists sent there were among the elites that Earth had had to offer, the women were scientists, and not only did they survive, but were able to rebuild and thrive. They perpetuate the species through parthenogenesis. Six hundred years after the plague, a few men appear as messengers from Earth. They are imposing, taller then the women living on Whileaway, but that reads as a threatening image rather than one of protection to the women who had never seen men in their lifetimes, on the one hand, and had required no male for their survival. Men thus become the aliens. In terms of action, nothing other than the conversations between the negotiating parties happens, the reader is left questioning possible outcomes. It is an exploration of a complex society which does not idealize either of the sexes, but presents the feminine experience matter-of-factly, albeit disrupted by an unanticipated event that threatens to upset a six hundred-year old ballance. It also provides an answer to what Sargent asserts regarding childbirth and rearing: "adverse reaction to childbirth grows out of the fact that women, now and in the past, have been victimized by it" (Sargent 1979, xi). Such a reaction is certainly prompted by the fact that women were forced into a pattern of existence where they could no longer choose, which is precisely what many women, Russ included, contend with in their works. Sargent further argues that:

"Patriarchal childbirth—childbirth as penance and as medical emergency—and its sequel, institutionalized motherhood, is alienated labor,

exploited labor, keyed to an 'efficiency' and a profit system having little to do with the needs of mothers and children, carried on in physical and mental circumstances over which the woman in labor has little or no control." (*More Women of Wonder* xli)

Without such a system in place to force women into their perceived obligations, victimizing them, Russ is able to explore a world where there is no question of exploitation, mothers choose when, how or even if to procreate. As a result, partners care for their daughters (on Whileaway only daughters are born through parthenogenesis) equally and in agreement. The world is not a "clean, well lighted place" utopia like its literary predecessors. The main character, Janet, mentions that she is the survivor of three duels, all confirmed kills, and she is the chief of police, meaning there is crime for such a position to be needed. She admits that one of the biggest problems they have with advancement is time, therefore not everything runs smoothly and as planned. However, none of the women takes on the role of the man in its traditional form, there is no strong versus weak partner based on sex, in child rearing or in other aspects of life. The strong and weak dichotomy is applied situationally, based on skills or needs, not default physical traits, thus challenging the preordained roles women have to fill within a society.

Finally, Ursula K. LeGuin constructs both *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974) as sociological and anthropological experiments. In the former, the entire society is made up of sexually neutral individuals, who shift genders during the period of "kemmer". The frequency with which this period occurs and its duration varies from person to person and is also subject to social and environmental conditions. Out of two partners one will become female and the other male, with no preestablished rule as to who will be which, as it is all a momentary and temporary decision. During one *kemmer* one of the partners can be female and during the other the same person can be male, either with the full functionality of that specific sex for the whole duration of that *kemmer*. This allows for the exploration of several things, the first of which is the lack of discrimination based on gender. Due to the fact that they are neutral most of the time and that when they are not they can be either, gender does not play any role in the organizational, cultural or social activities of their planet. Secondly, the default is not male, to which the female body is a variant, therefore these categories are of no relevance in any context, and conversations about binary opposites do not occur. Thirdly, since for the brief period of *kemmer* one can become either sex, they experience life as such, thus when they shift and their partner becomes the other sex, they have an empiric understanding of how that life experience feels. The story is told from the perspective of a terran man, Genly Ai, who was sent to

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Winter, or Gethen in the language of the people he encounters, allowing for the readers to follow along in his transformational journey through this alien experience.

The Dispossessed presents two societies, that of planet Annares, which is ruled by complete anarchy at the will of its inhabitants, following a planet-wide revolution, and the equivalent of Earth, Urras where political games between nations and the familiar social structures are dominant. Both societies are presented in depth with their merits and flaws, neither one being idealized. Shevek, the main character, travels from his birthplace on Anarres to Urras to further his scientific research, and his experience serves as a lens through which all structures can be compared. LeGuin does not offer easy answers to age old problems, but rather presents a very complex taxonomy and concludes that "freedom is never very safe" (Le Guin 2002, 317) and yet, it is desirable to corruption: "It was our purpose all along - our Syndicate, this journey of mine - to shake up things, to stir ou, to break some habits, to make people ask question. To behave like Anarchists. So, you see, nobody is quite sure what happens next" (Le Guin 2002, 316). Once more, the reader is invited to question and decide if they would indeed return with Shevek on Anarres, as Anarresti or, alternatively find a different structure altogether.

These breakdowns of convention, specifically made easy by the already unconventional setting of science fiction, can further be seen as the deconstruction of a reality in smaller images, that is the literary texts, which allow for a more thorough analysis. If a reality no longer fits for a vast segment of the population and certain models which have been in place did not work, or rather they only work for a small segment of the general population, feminist science fiction purports new models. By infusing them in their works, these women authors shaped the genre and helped it grow, by showing that it can indeed be different and it can look further than merely mirroring existing systems in futuristic scenarios. In giving them the due credit, one may safely conclude that it is truly these women pioneers who played a key role in proving that the beyond is not only a place in the deep space, and it could be reached by entering the wormhole through a device we have always had at our disposal — literature; it has been perfected across generations by many of their predecessors, as biologist and SF author Vonda McIntyre says: "people like Kate Wilhelm, and Ursula Le Guin, and Joanna Russ, and Andre Norton, and Anne McCaffrey, and Marion Zimmer Bradley kicked down doors in their generation that people in my generation got to walk through" (qtd. Yaszek 2022, xxiii.

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Is Carl Gustav Jung's Archetype an Idea in the Platonic sense?

Abstract: The present study offers a comparative overview of two fundamental concepts in the philosophies of Plato and Jung, namely the *Idea* and the *Archetype*. The objectives of our research are: (1) to succinctly present the meanings of the Jungian Archetype; (2) to distinguish between the *Archetype in itself* and the *archetypal representation*, concerning the issues of consciousness, experience, and transformation; (3) to demonstrate the ambivalent nature of the Archetype, with reference to studies such as *Christ as a Symbol of the Self* and *Answer to Job*; (4) to conduct a comparative analysis between the Jungian Archetype and the Platonic Idea through three key arguments which we will further discuss in this paper. Broadly speaking, the conclusions we will draw bear both scientific and moral significance. This is because the Archetype can be called an Idea in the Platonic sense only by adopting an arbitrary approach, which requires understanding the Idea as a psychologized transcendental concept – a transcendence of consciousness, rather than of experience.

Keywords: Jungian Archetype, representation, Idea, Plato, Carl Gustav Jung

Introduction

Many philosophical paradigms can trace their ideational *prima causa* in Plato's philosophy. This perspective is aptly encapsulated by the dictum: "Nothing without Plato, and very little after him." When examining the history of philosophy, it becomes evident that Plato's influence was so profound that it has often been said of Western philosophy that it is nothing more than a series of footnotes to Plato's philosophy (Whitehead 1978, 39). What is particularly striking about Plato's system is not merely that it provided a foundational source of nourishment for thought and creative inspiration to those "near" him - his peers and successors, for philosophers in general – but that Platonism was embraced (even) by those outside the realm of metaphysics – by "non-metaphysicists". This remarkable adaptability speaks of the versatility and enduring relevance of Platonic ideas, which extend their influence far beyond the strictly philosophical into extremely diverse intellectual and cultural spheres. And so, we arrive to the Swiss analytical psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who –

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despite self-identifying as a "non-philosopher" (Jung 2014, 4889) in favour of the title of empirical psychologist – makes numerous references to the *Idea* of the ancient philosopher when defining the fundamental concept of his thought, namely the *Archetype*. Furthermore, certain definitions provided by Jung for these archetypes might lead the reader to the conclusion that the Archetype is semantically equivalent to the Idea.

To clarify the semantic nuances of the two aforementioned concepts, this study aims to undertake an analysis – without claiming it to be an exhaustive one – of what the equivalence between Archetype and Idea means within Jung's thought. In other words, the purpose of this paper is to explore the conditions under which the Jungian Archetype might be regarded as a Platonic notion, especially in light of Jung's aspiration for it to be recognized as the fundamental and "demonstrative" concept of an empirical psychology.

In order to support this thesis, we have established the following objectives: (1) to provide a succinct presentation of the meanings of the Jungian Archetype; (2) to highlight the distinction between *Archetypus an sich - Archetype in itself* and *archetypal representation*, in relation to the issues of consciousness, experience, and transformation; (3) to capture the manner in which the Archetype can claim an ambivalent nature, referencing two key studies: *Christ as a Symbol of the Self* (Jung 2014, 4040-75) and *Answer to Job* (Jung 2014, 5239-354); (4) to conduct a comparative analysis between the Jungian Archetype and the Platonic *Idea*, based on three arguments which we will discuss in the remainder of this paper. The findings of this study necessitate a thorough comparative and conceptual analysis as its methodological approach.

I. What is the Significance of the Archetype in Jung's Thought?

Broadly speaking, the Archetype, in Jung's analytical psychology, represents an innate form that exists *a priori* (Jung 2014, 1813) within the unconscious of all individuals across the world. From this initial definition, we can identify three key characteristics of the Jungian Archetype: 1) its capacity to transcend any specific experience, owing to its *a priori* nature; 2) its hereditary nature, as an innate form; 3) its universality, through the presence of the Archetype within the psychic structure of all human individuals. The Archetype's particularity of being a universally present form grants it the status of a key concept in analytical psychology, as it largely coincides with what the *collective unconscious* largely represents – a psychological construct that distinguishes Jung in the "eon" of psychoanalysis. More specifically, the collective unconscious is a universal

acquisition, as it is composed of contents that are identical across all individuals and cultures (Jung 2014, 3512). Moreover, the Archetype inherits its hereditary characteristic from the collective unconscious. Unlike Freud's *personal unconscious*, which is shaped by biographical experiences, the collective unconscious does not derive from personal experience; it is innate (Jung 2014, 3511). Thus, the difference between the collective unconscious and the Archetype is merely "hierarchical", analogous to the relationship between genus and species, rather than qualitative, as both entail similar attributes.

In any case Jung established himself within the realm of psychoanalysis through the formulation of the theory of archetypes, supported primarily by their universal, hereditary, and *a priori* nature, as well as through the "objectification" of the unconscious – which ceased to be confined to personally connoted data. Analytical psychology is thus characterised as a *collective* psychology, in contrast to Freud's psychoanalysis, which is understood as a psychology of the *individual*. Perhaps the central innovative element brought forth by analytical psychology does not (solely) lie in the ideological divergence between Jung and Freud. Rather, the great merit of analytical psychology resides in its affirmation of the individual's participation in the collective, through its inner dimension. Ultimately, analytical psychology is a psychology of "bringing-together" (and, why not?), a psychology that affirms a shared *primordial past* through the lens of common and pre-existing forms, which Jung calls *archetypes*.

Indeed, the Jungian Archetype is attributed an impressive and diverse array of definitions, with Jung himself describing and explaining the archetypes by referencing fields as varied as alchemy, psychology, biology, physics, philosophy, and theology. Without enumerating the full breadth of definitions offered by Jung, we limit ourselves to those most relevant to the present study. Thus, in Jung's works, archetypes are defined as: "ideas in the Platonic sense" (Jung 2014, 3587), an "explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic εἰδὸς" (Jung 2014, 3512), "forms or images of a collective nature" (Jung 2014, 4934), "universal and inherited patterns" (Jung 2014, 1728), "forms without content" (Jung 2014, 3556), and "primordial images" (Jung 2014, 2709; 3068). Regardless of the definitions that Jung formulates to provide convincing explanations regarding the importance of the Archetype, it occupies numerous roles in the economy of his works, particularly during the "formative" phase of analytical psychology.

Thus, in order to designate the universal structure pre-existing within the objective psyche[1], Jung initially employs the syntagm "primordial images" (Jacobi 1942, 39). By this, he refers to the idea that, beyond individual reminiscences, the psyche also contains latent contents (Jung 2014, 2709) that cannot be explained through personal experience but

rather through hereditary and universal factors. Later, in 1917, Jung refers to the innate structures of the unconscious psyche using the concept of *dominants*, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the universal form. Dominants were for him factors that shape certain experiences or, put differently, they are the precipitate of past experiences (Jung 2014, 2739); forces and actors (Samuels 2005, 20). Therefore, the distinction between *primordial images* and *dominants* lies in the relationship between passive/latent versus active or static versus dynamic. Last but not least, in the study *Instinct and the Unconscious* (Jung 2014, 3089), first published in 1919, Jung introduces the term *Archetype* to describe the *a priori* psychic form. He discusses the *Archetype* in connection with *instinct*, as he considers the two to jointly constitute the collective unconscious (Jung 2014, 3094).

II. The Dialectic of Heredity: Archetype or Archetypal Representation?

In certain works, by using the terms "primordial images" and "Archetype" interchangeably, Jung was accused of advocating the hereditary nature of *archetypal representations* (images) (Jung 2014, 3089). Beyond this accusation (of Lamarckism), Jung associated the *primordial image* with the *Archetype in itself*, not with the archetypal representation. Thus, he defined the primordial image as one possessing an archaic character, and therefore clearly consistent with mythological motifs. These motifs are common to all people and eras – akin to archetypes – and some of them are even recognizable in the dreams and fantasies of the mentally ill (Jung 2014, 2503).

To clarify the distinction between Archetype and archetypal representation/image – and thereby eliminate any confusion or accusations – Jung makes it explicit in his 1946 essay *On the Nature of the Psyche* (Jacobi 1942, 40) that: "The archetype as such is a psychoid factor that belongs, as it were, to the invisible, ultraviolet end of the psychic spectrum. It does not appear, in itself, to be capable of reaching consciousness. [...] everything archetypal which is perceived by consciousness seems to represent a set of variations on a ground theme" (Jung 2014, 3169). Elsewhere, Jung writes that the Archetype is: "a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms" (Jung 2014, 3587). Moreover, referring to primordial images as "the inherited possibilities of human imagination" (Jung 2014, 2709) – synonymous with archetypes – Jung asserted that it is not the representations that are inherited, but only the *possibility of representation* (Jung 2014, 2709). Therefore, the distinction between the *Archetype in itself* (Jung 2014b, 5032) – akin to Kant's concept of the *thing-in-itself* (Stevens 2006, 77) – and the

archetypal representation lies in the fact that what is inherited is not the representation itself but merely the *potential* for representation. In this sense, the Archetype represents a *tendency* to organize memories and imaginary contents, and this organizing tendency is inherited, not the content itself (Goodwyn 2023, 28). In other words, the *form* is inherited, while the *content* is not. Jung points out in another of his studies: "archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form" (Jung 2014, 3587).

The distinction between the Archetype in itself and the archetypal representation necessitates examining the Archetype in reference to three aspects: 1) consciousness, 2) dependence on experience, and 3) transformation. Considered a "psychoid factor" (Jung 2014, 3169) – and thus unrepresentable – and "soul-like" (Jung 1989, 397), the *Archetype in itself* is imperceptible. However, the archetypal image or representation – that is, the manifestation of the imperceptible Archetype in an archetypal image or symbol (Jacobi 1971, 75) – can be perceived through consciousness. In this regard, Jung explains: "A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience" (Jung 2014, 3587). Thus, the archetypal representation is the possibility of "entering into relation" with the Archetype, which in itself is imperceptible. The archetypal representation is the "material" form that the Archetype in itself takes once it collides with consciousness – an aspect clarified by Jacobi (1971, 75) as follows: "For as soon as the collective human core of the archetype, which represents the raw material provided by the collective unconscious, enters into relation with the conscious mind and its form-giving character, the archetype takes on «body», «matter», «plastic form» etc.; it becomes representable, and only then does it become a concrete image-an archetypal image, a symbol".

Last but not least, through its encounter with consciousness – thus through consciousness and perception – the Archetype is transformed in accordance with the individual consciousness in which it emerges (Jung 2014, 3513), as it "blends" with the personal data of the individual. In doing so, it becomes a non-hereditary archetypal representation. In other words, the *Archetype in itself* is *immediate* and therefore not subject to conscious processing (Jung 2014, 3513). However, archetypal representations are *mediated* by personal complexes, which causes every archetypal experience to merge typical "aspects" with personal ones (Kast 2020, 122). In this respect, Antony Stevens (2006, 79) speaks of the Archetype as a synthesis of the universal and the individual, the general and the unique.

Therefore, the distinction between Archetype in itself and archetypal representation is rooted along three coordinates:

1) From a psychological point of view, the Archetype in its pure state is an unconscious content, and therefore cannot be directly

represented or perceived. However, when the Archetype manifests through images or symbols, that is, as archetypal representations, it becomes conscious and, consequently, perceptible. In this regard, Jung observes: "Archetypes are typical forms of behaviour which, once they become conscious, naturally present themselves as *ideas and images*, like everything else that becomes a content of consciousness" (Jung 2014, 3183). Similarly, Jacobi (1971, 66) elaborates in detail: "Only when the archetypes come into contact with the conscious mind, that is, when the light of consciousness falls on them and their contours begin to emerge from the darkness and to fill with individual content, can the conscious mind differentiate them. Only then can consciousness apprehend, understand, elaborate, and assimilate them."

2) Acknowledging that no archetypal representation has a hereditary basis, with only the possibility of representation being inherited, with each representation being unique to every individual whose psychic life intertwines the archetypal/pattern with personal experience – it is crucial to recognize the idea that Jung's Archetype functions only in relation to life itself (Jung 2014, 5033). Thus, it is dependent on experience, and without it, it remains an empty form. Here, we encounter a (deliberate or serendipitous) echo of Kant's correlation between the intellect's concepts and sensible intuitions: *"Gedanken ohne Inhalt sind leer, Anschauungen ohne Begriffe sind blind"* (Kant 1868, 82) – *Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.* In other words, in a world devoid of human beings, *the Archetype would not be possible*, as it manifests only within the framework of the human psyche. Thus, the Archetype is not merely an idea that exists independently of the object – the individual; on the contrary, its existence is contingent upon the existence of the object itself. It is within the object – serving as a *subject* that triggers psychic phenomena – that the Archetype finds both its manifestation and representation.

3) Archetypal experience entails the actualisation of the Archetype in itself through the encounter between the archetypal and the personal. Thus, it encompasses both an *unchanging nature*, as an imperceptible and unconscious factor – the Archetype in itself – and the *possibility for transformation*, from its collision with the personal content of the consciousness in which it manifests.

III. The Ambivalence of the Archetype: A Jungian Hypothesis

Jung provides extensive analyses and explanations of the concept of the Archetype; however, we shall focus here on an aspect of particular relevance both for expanding the scope of understanding this concept and

for achieving the aims of the present study, namely *the problem of the ambivalence of the Archetype*.

According to Jung, the Archetype has the characteristic effect of seizing the psyche with a kind of primordial force and compelling it to transcend beyond the human realm and eliciting emotional responses that can manifest as both benevolent and malevolent (Jung 2014, 2714–15). Any "encounter" with the Archetype is inherently emotionalizing because it "summons up a voice that is stronger than our own" (Jung 2014, 7215). Such a superior power, perceived as a force existing within the soul of the individual is identified by Jung with God, whom he approaches as a *working hypothesis* of his "empirical" science. He describes God as "an absolutely necessary psychological function of an irrational nature" (Jung 2014, 2715)[2]. The *necessity* of this psychological function lies in the fact that "the idea of an all-powerful divine Being is present everywhere, unconsciously if not consciously, because it is an archetype" (Jung 2014, 2715). Furthermore, Jung contends that the existence of God is an insoluble problem because reason, as an intellectual function, cannot grasp the *irrational*, which he designates as a psychological function and as analogous to the *collective unconscious* (Jung 2014, 2715). In this framework, Jung refers to and equates the innate layer of the individual by (and with) the irrational tripartite structure – the collective unconscious – God. He also highlights the similarity between God and the unconscious in that: "Both are border-line concepts for transcendental contents" (Jung 2014, 5352).

In discussing the psychological parallelism between God and the unconscious, Jung refers to the *God-image* as being *the Archetype of the Self*, as he himself states: "the God-image does not coincide with the unconscious... but with this special content of it, namely the archetype of the Self" (Jung 2014, 5353). The Self, within Jungian psychology, is a notion designed to articulate an entity that is fundamentally unrecognisable, one that cannot be fully conceived because it surpasses the boundaries of human understanding (Jung 2014, 2882).

Moreover, the God-image, the Self, associated by Jung with Christ (Jung 2014, 4041) or with the *God within us* (Jung 2014, 2882), does not correspond directly to the Christian Christ but, rather, to the Gnostic Christ – who encompasses two opposing dimensions[3], namely good and evil. Thus, in *Christ as Symbol of the Self* – a study with strong Gnostic resonances – Jung asserts that "the Antichrist would correspond to the shadow of the self, namely the dark half of the human totality" (Jung 2014, 4046). In Jungian thought, the shadow represents evil, the Antichrist, and "the inferior part of the personality" (Jung 1989, 398). One of the Gnostic sources that influenced Jung's Gnostic approach to the Christological problem was Valentinus, who affirms that the mother of Christ gave birth to him with a certain shadow (Jung 2014, 4045).

Without delving further into detail, we observe that, within the Jungian paradigm, Christ represents the opposites of good and evil and the necessity of their unification. For this reason, the Self is referred to as the "archetype of wholeness" (Jung 2014, 5352–3) or "the totality of the personality" (Jung 1989, 398). Furthermore, Jung asserted that the God-image as totality – conceived as the union of opposites, good and evil – is identical to the image of the Self as totality. This parallel lead Jung to argue that the individual inherits the problem of opposites and their integration, as well as the quest for wholeness, from this primordial, divine image. Consequently, by noting that, in Jungian thought, Christ psychologically illustrates the archetype of the Self, which is associated with the God-image and encompasses dimensions of both good and evil, we can clearly see that Jung's central Archetype possesses an ambivalent nature alongside the imperative for achieving totality.

Moreover, the problem of divine ambivalence and the necessity for totality is further explored by Jung in *Answer to Job* – a pivotal work addressing the substance of evil and reflecting the author's affinity for Jewish and Gnostic influences. Specifically, in referencing the Old Testament *Book of Job*, Jung argues that the need for totality arises from Yahweh's inherently ambivalent – antinomic rather than divisive – nature, wherein he is "both a persecutor and a helper in one, and the one aspect is as real as the other" (Jung 2014, 5253). Here Jung examines the existence of a shadow God, defined as "the inferior part of the personality" (Jung 1989, 398). Therefore, of a God who, in a state of unconsciousness, projects onto Job his own fears regarding Job's potential unfaithfulness, subjecting him to injustice. Recognizing Yahweh's ambivalent conduct – unjust to humankind while desiring love and worship – Jung observes that Job "realizes God's inner antinomy" (Jung 2014, 5261).

Thus, in both works, Jung demonstrates that the ambivalent aspect of the psychological Archetype resonates with the ambivalent divine image – whether Gnostic or Old Testamental. By addressing the problem of divine ambivalence, Jung implies that evil, alongside good, originates from God. These claims challenge the theological doctrine of *privatio boni*, which posits that evil is merely the absence of good.

IV. Is the *Archetype* an *Idea* in the Platonic sense? A Comparative Analysis of the Jungian Archetype and the Platonic Idea

In many of his writings, Jung consistently reaffirms his position as a researcher within the domain of psychology, a statement through which he adamantly proclaims himself as a psychologist and not a philosopher[4], contrary to the views of some of his critics (Jung 2014, 4889). Furthermore,

he asserted that his psychology is fundamentally empirical and not a philosophical theory (Jung 2014, 3562). With this he delineated the distinction between empirical psychology and philosophy as following: "Facts are facts and contain no falsity. [...] To my mind it is more important that an idea exists than that it is true. [...] [There] is no way of establishing the truth or untruth of a transcendental statement other than by a subjective belief" (Jung 2014, 8553). More precisely, Jung explained that his methodology is phenomenological, directed towards phenomena and occurrences, hence towards facts (Jung 2014, 4890). Finally, he stated that "the collective unconscious is neither a speculative nor a philosophical but an empirical matter." (Jung 2014, 3552).

What constitutes then Jungian *empirical psychology*? The author elucidates this by addressing the problem of experience. In other words, Jung's empiricism involves the analysis of the unconscious by transcending the constraints imposed by theoretical prejudices (Jung 2014, 3563). He asserted that analytical psychology is inherently experimental, emphasizing that an experimental science undermines itself if it reduces its scope to purely theoretical constructs (Jung 2014, 3564). Thus, Jungian empirical psychology entails the presentation and analysis of experimental material independently of preconceived theoretical premises, which are to be only subsequently formulated.

Nevertheless, given that the Jungian Archetype is theorized (also) through reference to philosophical paradigms, Jung's psychology cannot be entirely detached from the realm of philosophy. Beyond the author's claim to empiricism, the "birth" of the Jungian Archetype as a theoretical concept has its conceptual roots in philosophy. This connection is evident because: (1) the Archetype is theorized using a lexicon derived (in part) from philosophical discourse; (2) the explanations through which Jung elaborates the Archetype reveal clear philosophical resonances. Thus, despite its empirical aspirations, Jungian psychology intersects substantially with philosophical thought. Moreover, Jung draws closer to the realm of philosophy through the very definitions he provides for the concept of the Archetype. In this regard, we review some of his explicitly philosophical definitions, such as: "ideas in the Platonic sense" (Jung 2014, 3587), "explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic εἶδος" (Jung 2014, 3512), and "forms without content" (Jung 2014, 3556). Particularly noteworthy are the former in which the Archetype is identified as an Idea in the Platonic sense or as an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic εἶδος.

Conversely, Plato himself defined his Idea through references to eternal archetypes. More precisely, ideas are explained by the ancient philosopher as eternal and immutable archetypes, existing beyond the level of human consciousness. Being non-spatial and residing within a

suprasensible realm, these eternal archetypes possess the capacity to create the sensible world through participation – albeit only as a copy – to the world of Ideas. This theory was openly criticised by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* (987b 10-15), who focused on its weak point, namely the impossibility of defining the concept of participation in forms: "Only the name 'participation' was new; for the Pythagoreans say that things exist by 'imitation' of numbers, and Plato says they exist by participation, changing the name. But what the *participation* or the *imitation* of the Forms could be they left an open question" (Aristotle 1908, 14).

This statement Therefore, we recognize that Plato's Idea is transcendent, immutable, and perfect, whereas Jung's Archetype has an existence grounded in experience, is subject to change, and is imperfect. Considering these contrasting qualities of the Idea and the Archetype, the question arises: Is Jung's Archetype an Idea in the Platonic sense? To address this inquiry, we propose a detailed analysis of the two concepts, which embody qualitatively opposing characteristics. For the purpose of a clearer comparison, we have structured our exploration into three arguments, as follows:

a. *The Argument of the Functional Non-Transcendence of the Jungian Archetype*

The transcendence of the Platonic Idea lies in its characteristic of preceding any experience. In this sense, the Idea exists before experience, as an eternal, pre-existing transcendent form (Jacobi 1971, 49-50). Being transcendent, and thus situated beyond any experience, the Idea also possesses the attributes of atemporality and aspatiality. In other words, "Platonic Ideas are not abstractions or constructs of a thinking subject (the result of I, the Ego or the thinking Transcendental Subject), but are real entities, existing independently of there being a thinking or seeing subject: they are «things»" (Dal Maschio 2015, 53). In contrast, the Jungian Archetype can only be discussed in relation to the thinking subject and experience, for it promotes "basal experiences of life" (Samuels 2005, 19) and "entered into the picture with life itself" (Jung 2014, 5033). Whereas the Platonic Idea is transcendental, existing above the world and beyond the horizon of experience, the Jungian Archetype manifests itself within life, within experience, thus within time and space. Consequently, situated within the world and discussed within the horizon of experience, the Archetype has, from a functional standpoint, the characteristic of non-transcendence. Furthermore, independent of the interpretation of archetypes as structures that come into action concomitantly with life – thus existing through experience, through "concreteness" – these archetypes are, in a general definition, "impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences" (Jung 2014,

2714) and "deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity" (Jung 2014, 2713). Thus, the Archetype is fundamentally bound to experience and human life, differing significantly from the Platonic Idea, which exists independently of the experiential realm.

However, *can the Archetype be synonymous with the Idea in the Platonic sense*? The answer concerns the issue of the "psychologization" of transcendence. Thus, in its form as such, the Archetype can be thought of psychologically– conceptually in analogy to the Idea. In this regard, Jolande Jacobi's explanation (1971, 50) is pertinent: "the «archetype as such» (not perceptible) [...] transcends the area of the psyche; it is beyond apprehension «psychoid». Like the Platonic Idea, it precedes all conscious experience. Here, of course, «transcendental» must be taken not as a metaphysical concept but empirically as signifying «beyond consciousness»." In other words, the notion of the transcendent must be understood psychologically (and empirically) as "beyond consciousness," not as a metaphysical *beyond*. Therefore, the similarity between the Idea and the Archetype implies an empirically–psychological approach to transcendence, which means understanding the Archetype in itself as an imperceptible form that surpasses the domain of consciousness. Positioned beyond consciousness, the imperceptible Archetype is located in the unconscious. Thus, we observe that the Platonic Idea can only be thought of by analogy with the Archetype in itself under the condition that the former is re-semanticized psychologically, that is, approached within the paradigm of psychic life.

b. *The Argument of the Qualitative Imperfection of the Archetype*

Starting from the well-known Platonic Idea, which possesses the quality of being perfect, we highlight another qualitative difference between it and Jung's Archetype. Thus, in the paradigm of the ancient philosopher, the Idea belongs to the intelligible world as opposed to the copy, or material object, which participates to the Idea and belongs to the sensible world. The copy participates functionally to the Idea, in the sense that any form of knowledge based on the senses does not represent knowledge of true reality. Therefore, reality is composed only of Ideas/Forms – the only real entities (Dal Maschio 2015, 53) – while the objects in our experience having only the attribute of being mere imperfect copies of the Idea. In other words, the Idea is the only true and perfect reality, and evil/imperfection belonging to the copy in the sensible world, which cannot participate substantially in the same way to the Idea that dwells in the intelligible world and not in the material one.

In analytical psychology, on the other hand, the Archetype carries the characteristic of imperfection. This imperfection is evident in Jung's work through the theorization of good and evil as substances. In other words, in

Jung's vision, the Archetype is ambivalent, presenting immanently (in its nature) two substantial–antinomical principles, good and evil, which must be unified in order to achieve the totality, the individual balance. Without delving into these aspects, we briefly point out that, in Jungian psychology, the substantiality of evil does not imply the independence of evil in relation to good and thus a duality, but the co-participation of good and evil, under the same purpose, in the self-realization of the individual. For this reason, it can be observed that the Jungian Archetype, despite its imperfection, contains within itself the quality of reaching "perfection" in an individual – subjective sense, which coincides with the process of self-realization. We refer only briefly to certain particularities of analytical psychology – which will be further detailed in an appropriate thematic context – as our aim in this work is not to show how opposites are unified in Jung's psychology, but to outline the semantic-ideatic differences between Platonic and Jungian thought.

The imperfect nature of the Archetype in relation to the Platonic Idea is also expressed by Jolande Jacobi (1942, 42) as follows: The archetypes are also akin to what Plato called the «idea». But Plato's idea is a model of supreme perfection only in the «luminous» sense, whereas Jung's archetype is bipolar, embodying the dark side as well as the light."

Therefore, based on the analyses above, we conclude that the Jungian Archetype is the imperfect objective–ontological form, in opposition to the Platonic Idea, the perfect, objective–ontological form. Moreover, the imperfect character of the Archetype coincides, rather, from a qualitative–semantic point of view, but not functionally, with the meaning of the Platonic copy. This argument can also be supported by the fact that the Jungian Archetype has its representation and, therefore, existence in the sensible world, limited by time and space, opposed to the supra-sensible, perfect reality.

c.   *The Argument of the Structural Inconsistency of the Archetype*

While the Platonic Idea is immutable, the Jungian Archetype possesses the quality of changeability, of modification and actualisation, under the influence of personal experience within the consciousness in which it arises. Psychologically, the Archetype in itself, in its form, retains the characteristic of immutability, since it is unconscious, and therefore imperceptible and unrecognised. However, once activated and consciously perceived, the Archetype undergoes transformation, becoming *represented* and *perceptible* (Jacobi 1971, 51), thus becoming an archetypal representation perceived through the participation of consciousness. The Archetype can only be "known" as an archetypal representation, and as the effect of the

Archetype in itself, which remains merely a hereditary potential for representation and an unconscious structural/organising factor. Regarding the mutable nature of the Archetype, Jung provides a significant explanation: "It has a potential existence only, and when it takes shape in matter it is no longer what it was. It persists throughout the ages and requires interpreting ever anew. The archetypes are the imperishable elements of the unconscious, but they change their shape continually" (Jung 2014, 3687).

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the distinction between the Archetype in itself and its archetypal representation, a difference rooted in the issue of heredity. The Archetype in itself is hereditary, whereas the archetypal representation – or the represented Archetype, as Jacobi terms it (1971, 50) – is not. Thus, the Archetype in itself, existing beyond the bounds of consciousness, remains immutable since it is not consciously apprehended. In contrast, the Archetype in its dimension as an archetypal representation – and hence consciously realized – undergoes transformation and incorporates the subjectivity of the personal material present in the consciousness of the individual who serves as the object of the Archetype's influence.

In summary, the Archetype in itself, the unfilled form devoid of biographical content, is immutable, akin to the Platonic Idea. However, unlike the Idea, which exists independently of the thinking/observing subject and experience, the existence of the Archetype is contingent upon the observation of archetypal experience by the individual. As demonstrated, the Archetype relies on an observing subject and exists as long as there is a subject to perceive its activity or action. In other words, the Archetype – formally immutable – can only be analysed as an archetypal representation through its eruption into the human psyche. An activation perceived as an archetypal event, hence an archetypal experience, which is dependent upon the existence of a subject. Consequently, the parallelism between the *Archetype in itself* and the *archetypal representation* endows the Jungian Archetype with a degree of inconsistency, in contrast to the Platonic Idea, which remains immutable and exists in and of itself, independent of any subject or certifying experience. In Platonic philosophy, as previously discussed, only the imperfect copy is mutable, while the perfect Idea is not. In Jung's framework, however, the Archetype is inherently imperfect, which – beyond the inconsistency introduced by its interaction with consciousness – also entails a mutable nature. Thus, the Archetype is, by its very essence, changeable due to its imperfection. This quality aligns it, from a qualitative perspective, more closely with the Platonic notion of the copy of the Idea than with the Idea itself.

Conclusions

A researcher of universal *a priori* structures, Jung established himself within the psychoanalytic tradition through the theorization of the concept of the Archetype in a manner that both impresses and confounds. Perhaps the most exalted definition Jung offers for the Archetype is that of an *Idea in the Platonic sense*. However, upon further reflection, this definition reveals a contradiction that Jungian scholars perceive as a form of unsettling restlessness, like an ambivalence, one might say. If Jung is correct in asserting that the human being is, par excellence, an archetypal and therefore ambivalent entity, does this imply that Yahweh is the primary source of ambivalence? Such a hypothesis, however, requires an entirely different framework for discussion.

Returning to the definition of the Archetype as a Platonic Idea, we conclude by asserting that Jung's Archetype is not synonymous with the Platonic Idea. Thus, the thesis proposed in the introduction of this study has been discussed primarily through the lens of three arguments that elucidate the evident distinction between the Archetype and the Idea. Beyond the sections necessary for a comparative approach to the Idea and the Archetype, we have demonstrated that the major difference between Plato's fundamental concept and Jung's lies in three opposing aspects: (1) transcendence versus experience; (2) immutability versus change; and (3) perfection versus imperfection and ambivalence.

The significance of the results obtained in this study bears both scientific and moral imperative for the domain of philosophy, given that the Archetype can be termed an Idea in the Platonic sense only if the Idea is understood as an empirically psychologized transcendental concept. In other words, Jung's Archetype can be perceived as a Platonic Idea only if the Idea is reinterpreted psychologically, as transcending consciousness and preceding experience, akin to Jung's Archetype – situated *a priori* in the depths of the collective unconscious. Finally, the Archetype can be viewed as a Platonic Idea only by detaching the Idea from the suprasensible realm and "relocating" it within the deep layers of the psyche, in the collective unconscious, thereby placing it within the framework of analytical psychology. Through this arbitrary approach, the Archetype can represent the Platonic Idea, but reimagined empirically. The question thus remains open: *Is the Archetype an Idea in the Platonic sense?*

Notes

[1] In analytical psychology, the unconscious psyche designates the collective unconscious.
[2] Jung does not discuss God from a dogmatic point of view.

[3] The issue of opposites is presented, in particular, by Jung in his writings *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Alchemical Studies* and *Mysterium Coniunctionis*.

[4] "It is certainly remarkable that my critics, with few exceptions, ignore the fact that, as a doctor and scientist, I proceed from facts which everyone is at liberty to verify. Instead, they criticize me as if I were a philosopher, or a Gnostic with pretensions to supernatural knowledge." (Jung 2014, 5191)

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The status of knowledge at Richard of Saint Victor

Abstract: The present paper aims to shed light on the theory of knowledge developed by Richard of Saint Victor, the so-called *model of knowledge-contemplation* that supports all the mystical and trinitarian works of the victorine. The framework of these writings is given by the functioning of a complex system of *affective life* and *cognitive life*, of adequate operation of *the faculties of knowledge of the rational soul*, admirably described by an original allegorical and tropological commentary on *Genesis*, in the spiritual treatise *Beniamin minor*. Of course, the greatest dignity is the knowledge of divine truths, but mystical ecstasy is reached only after ascending the levels of the science of sensible realities. If the nature of the spirit mirrors the divine essence, the faculties of the mind are the image of the life of Trinity's persons. Thus, the richardian trinitarian doctrine comes to complete the mystical one, composing together the ample gnoseological project of understanding the functioning and the limits of human knowledge. We will refer to the whole of Richard's work, but we will insist on the two treatises that bring more use to this research: *Beniamin minor* and *De Trinitate*.

Keywords: Richard of Saint Victor, knowledge, gnosiology, mysticism, contemplation, Trinity.

Introduction

The gnoseological model proposed by Richard of Saint Victor, one of the most influential spiritual theologians of the 12th century, occupies a legitimate place in the history of philosophy being the fruit of a cultivated and refined spirit that accurately evokes the operation of the faculties of knowledge and the limits of language in transcendence description. This *model of knowledge-contemplation* can be considered therefore a significant part of the tradition of philosophical approaches to the functioning of human experience and the attainment of truth. We are dealing with a trinitarian model, analogous to the relationship of the persons of the Trinity. Even though this analogy is part of a certain tradition, Richard manages to arrive at his own precise model that takes into account both the thematizable and the non-thematizable part of experience. For the understanding of what will be presented, we consider it welcome and offer further a brief familiarization with the author and the spirit in which he was formed.

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The Victorines, along with Bernard of Clairvaux, are considered the founders of medieval Christian mysticism (Gilson 1922, 79-80). If Saint Bernard, who is at permanent war with dialectics and the dialecticians, subscribes to the affective tradition that places the beatific union in love, the Augustinian canons from the Parisian Abbey of Saint Victor practice a *speculative mysticism* that assumes the intellectual character of ecstasy and places it in knowledge. For them, profane knowledge is added to the sacred, and dialectical reason is used as exercise in order to acquire wisdom and reach the pinnacle of contemplation. No teaching is useless, but the liberal arts must not consider themselves as an end, but together with theology and on the background of a preparatory way of life, seek the ways that can reach contemplation. Richard, Hugo's disciple and successor, builds rational arguments by which he seeks to reach from the weak ontological domain of appearance to that of fullness and essence. Reason starts from the realm of the sensible, the world of alteration and change, and, always calibrated by the strength of faith, climbs until it overcomes its conceptual limits and reaches the highest step of knowledge where it meets the *Supreme Wisdom*. In this register there are no more borders, and the soul, in expansion and formless (*dilatatio mentis* and *excessus mentis*), merges with the divine substance in an ecstasy that deifies it. The desired end is therefore that of any mysticism, but in the present case the path will be marked by certain *necessary reasonings*, which validate to the logician the fact that he has not deviated from the right path. By such an approach of intuitive intellectual knowledge of the supreme singular - the divine essence, the Victorine mediates the transition from Saint Anselm to Duns Scotus. For them, the universal is not formed through inductive abstraction, starting from the sensible, from the particular to the universal through the mediation of a phantasm, but deductively, through the direct apprehension of the relationships between things or concepts, assuming a *common nature* as a condition of possibility for the existence of things (Libera 1996, 424-453). Richardian speculative mysticism places love on a comparable position to knowledge, because only through the contribution of both its cognitive model can function. But it is about divine supersensible love, called by the words *caritas, dilectio, condilectio*; sensitive love has a lower dignity and is designated by the word *amor*.

The School of Saint Victor, consolidated by Hugo, remains a spiritual landmark for more than a century and heralds the universities of the next century. The abbey followed the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, more permissive and open than the other monastic orders, which does not repudiate any study intended to bring more knowledge to the human mind, connects pagan texts with Christian spiritual meditation and models a complete educational program according to which all human studies are unified in the ascent of fallen man towards divine contemplation: Victorine

mysticism therefore assumes encyclopedism, logic, learning but also teaching, prayer, meditation, action and contemplation, any form of experience through which one gradually advances in the true knowledge of things, of the human and the divine. And the truth of knowledge is guaranteed only by assuming the divine Word as the transcendental origin of experience and by the harmonious functioning of the soul's faculties.

As previously mentioned, Richard claims the use of deductive reason to research higher truths. Arguments in favour of the existence of divinity must be based on experience, and from here reason will universalize knowledge until it is overcome in transcendence. The Boethian gradual universalization, the necessary reasonings and the Anselmian ontological argument, the pre-eminence of faith and the Augustinian positive theology, the neoplatonic hierarchical model, are dominant influences of Richard's thinking, which, however, succeeds in an original synthesis of a trinitarian *knowledge-contemplation model*.

Because the data about Richard's life are not very well known, and they have an essential contribution to his intellectual formation, we consider it opportune to quickly outline a few significant features: his date of birth is unknown, he is Scottish and he arrived at Saint Victor as a young man, in the time of Abbot Gilduin. In 1159 he was sub-prior, and from 1162 until his death, on March 10, 1173, he was prior. He finds at the School of Saint Victor an elite of diverse nationalities, under the guidance of the Saxon Hugo. As a prior, Richard is involved in a series of problematic situations generated by the tyrannical abbot Ernis (1161-1172), a fact that distracted him from his activity as a preacher and writer. He addresses this crisis in the oratorical treatise *Super exiit edictum*, where he symbolically reminds his confreres the true vocation, with its inherent demands. The Victorine gets involved in the conflict between Thomas Becket and King Henry II, being on the side of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who took refuge for a while at Saint Victor.

The Richardian work, vast and still not completely edited, was classified by Jean Châtillon as follows: biblical commentaries, theological treatises (*De Trinitate*), spiritual works (*Beniamin minor, Beniamin maior, De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis*), sermons, letters. The works mentioned in parentheses are the best known, most widespread and most exemplary for constituting the epistemological model that guides all Victorine's writings. The letters and dedications of the works show that many Richardian writings were drawn up at the request of friends or disciples; therefore, contemporaries showed Richard admiration and respect. Spiritual theologian, mystic, confessor, thinker and teacher, Richard succeeds Hugo in the leadership of the School, strengthens the Victorine spiritual centre and earns his highest appreciation: Dante believes in the genuine mystical

experiences of the Victorine when he says of him: "See, flaming beyond the glowing breath / of Isidore, of Bede and of Richard, / who in contemplation was more than man" (Dante 1975, 115), the Italian editor of the treatise *De Trinitate*, Mario Spinelli, calls Richard "Doctor Contemplationis" (Riccardo di S . Vittore 1990, 27) and considers him "the most brilliant" Victorine (Riccardo di S. Vittore 1990, 17), and Umberto Eco refers to him with the formula "the learned Richard of Saint Victor" (Eco 2003, 134), who is interested in everything that exists: theology, philosophy, alchemy, numerology, etc. He deals with the spiritual meaning of the sacred text, researches the measurements of the Temple of Jerusalem, wanting to reconstruct its plan and obtain its model, despite the textual obscurity regarding this aspect, making of all those assimilated the scaffolding for contemplation.

Richard's mystique – presentation of the functioning of the faculties of knowledge

The mystical work of Richard of Saint Victor transmits in an allegorical form his philosophy, respectively the precise model of the human faculties of knowledge and their mode of functioning in the experience of knowledge and truth.

The path to contemplation is symbolically presented by Richard in the spiritual treatise *Beniamin minor*, where he offers an allegorical and tropological interpretation of the name and history of each of Jacob's twelve sons with his wives Leah and Rachel, and the slaves of the wives, Zilpah and Bilha. Richard was inspired by Jerome's work, *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*, which etymologically explains biblical proper names, but, unlike Jerome, who is attached to the literal meaning of Scripture, the Victorine reaches extensive spiritual and moral considerations. The originality of the work lies in the fact that it does not deal with Jacob's wives on the one hand and his sons on the other, both episodes being included in a vast project of symbolic interpretation that wants to offer the model of Christian life (spiritual and moral) and to communicate the soul's itinerary to God.

The tradition of allegorical commentaries for the two Old Testament episodes can be quickly sketched as follows (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 19-39): at Philo of Alexandria, *Jacob's wives* are *faculties of the soul*, Leah is reason, and Rachel is sensitivity; Rachel's death at the birth of Benjamin symbolizes the death of the soul that gives birth to the vain glory of the sensible. Philo's position, which favours Leah, did not influence Christian thinking. The Fathers of the Church initiate the tradition of interpretation according to which the relationship between *Leah and Rachel* is that between the *Synagogue and the Church* and that between *active life and*

contemplative life (predicative reason and contemplative intellect). The *Marta - Mary model* was associated with Leah - Rachel by Augustine and Gregory the Great. Rachel, who dies on the way to Ephrata, is the Church always on the way, and the way is Christ. Allegorical meanings will also be attributed to the maidservants of the two wives, as well as to the 12 sons of Jacob, the *12 patriarchs*, ancestors of the Jewish people, those who gave their names to the tribes of Israel. The allegorical meaning of the patriarchs is established by commentaries on *Genesis 49*, the episode "*Jacob's Blessings*", where Jacob speaks to his sons; the coming of the Messiah is announced here, whom the commentaries identify with Christ and his Church. The medieval commentaries on the mentioned biblical episodes (Leah-Rachel and the sons of Jacob) are inspired by patristic interpretations and reveal all four meanings of biblical reading: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical.

Richard of Saint Victor prefers the allegorical meaning, also targeting the moral one. If the Bible speaks about God, it also speaks about man. He sees in Scripture as in a mirror, because it proposes a vocabulary, a system of symbols and images whose meaning must be established. Thus, the Old Testament characters are feelings to be controlled, virtues to be practiced, right judgments to be operated, knowledge to be acquired, activities to be exercised, and the history of Israel is that of every man. For the restoration of fallen man, therefore, a good understanding of divine writings is necessary, in the interpretation of which profane disciplines are helpful, but exercised under the light of divine grace.

The knowledge of the *rational soul* becomes central, whose double force determines the two powers: *cognitive life* and *affective life*, i.e. *ratio* and *affectio* (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 42-48). Thus, the faculties of knowledge are the following: *senses* (sensitivity), *imagination* and *intellect* – with its two registers: proper *reason* (predicative, conceptualizing) and contemplative *intellect* (intelligence). As imagination is at the service of reason, three forms of soul activity correspond to the three powers of extended reason (cognitive life): *cogitatio* with the help of imagination, *meditatio* through reason and *contemplatio* through intelligence.

Rachel (reason) with her servant Bilha (imagination) constitutes the *cognitive life*, and Leah (affection) with her slave Zilpah (sensitivity) represents the *affective life*. *Beniamin minor* will establish correspondences between Jacob's sons with the four women and the states of the rational soul in its ascent to God. *Knowledge (through right judgments and spiritual senses)* and *love (through virtue and holy desires)* will control every stage of rational and virtuous behaviour in this ascension.

Leah the dull-eyed, the older sister, is the desire for justice, the instruction in virtue, and her eyes are sick because she misjudges things from the point of view of the unjust, the majority of people. Rachel of unique beauty is the love of wisdom, the teaching of truth; although she is

the one he loves, Jacob has to wait seven years to marry her (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 91-95). You can accompany yourself with spiritual intelligence only after you have fully established yourself in the virtuous life. The two servants are necessary, because reason could not know anything without imagination, and affectivity could not experience and order anything without sensitivity (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 101-105).

The wives of Jacob - the rational soul touched by the Holy Spirit and eager for divine knowledge - represent the faculties of knowledge as instruments (powers) with which the soul is endowed, and Jacob's sons are the faculties (instruments, powers of the soul) in exercise.

If the affects (feelings) are ordered, they are good and are called virtues, otherwise they are bad and represent vices. Leah first gives birth to four sons, and these correspond to the first four affections: *fear* of sin and divine punishment (Reuben), *pain* of penance (Simeon), *hope* of forgiveness (Levi) and love between the soul and God*, love* of truth, charity (Judas) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 111-127).

Rachel is not yet fertile, and Jacob still has two sons with her servant, Bilha (the faculty of judgment): *the consideration of the evils that will befall the sinner* (Dan - determinative judgment, the conceptualization of the visible) and *the consideration of the rewards intended for the righteous* (Nephtali - analogical judgment, the transition from sensitive to supersensitive) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 137-157).

Next come the two sons of Zilpah, virtues that help to overcome the dangers of sensitivity: *rigorous abstinence*, renouncing the pleasures of the senses (Gad) and *tenacious patience*, enduring the sufferings of the sensible world (Asher) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 157-163).

The sons of the two maids fortify the peace of the soul (internal, through thoughts and external, through the senses), so that they can transform into virtues the last three affections, i.e. the last children of Leah*: the joy and inner sweetness* of the quiet soul that has glimpsed the eternal reward (Issachar), *the contempt of vices*, which gives the courage and zeal necessary for the continuation of the soul's ascent (Zebulon), and *the shame* (before God, not men) of the sin committed after installation in virtue, *modesty, calming* the excess of zeal of previous virtues (daughter Dinah, the last born); as she does not initiate actions, but quells them, she is not the founder of a Jewish tribe. Dinah is violated by Shechem when the soul finds pleasure in the vain glory of worldly praises and goods; the rape takes place when her brothers are away with the flocks to graze, so the soul can fall at any time if it does not keep its defenders close. The fact that her brothers avenged her dishonour is a new soul imbalance, even if it intends to suppress the first one (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 197-263).

The two sons of Rachel are: *the discernment* that can regulate the virtues and orient the spirit, which culminates in full *self-knowledge* (Joseph,

who must lead his brothers) and *the knowledge of God - contemplation* (Benjamin). Benjamin is born last, and his mother dies at birth. Rachel dies so that Benjamin can be born. Only after harmonizing all affections and full self-knowledge is it possible to contemplate divine realities, and for this reason must die, it is annihilated. The sublime knowledge of contemplation takes place on the summit of the holy mountain, the end of the spiritual journey, where the spirit arrives led by Christ, to see him transfigured, clothed in the light of divine intelligence (the transfigured Christ is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, witnesses of the transfiguration). At the height of the soul, the human meets the divine, full self-knowledge suddenly turns into the knowledge of God, Joseph is followed by Benjamin, meditation turns into contemplation. Benjamin is the soul united with God in the divine betrothal, true happiness (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 283-341).

At the end of the treatise *Beniamin minor*, Richard distinguishes three degrees of knowledge of God, which correspond to the ascent of the soul to three heavens: by faith (sub-rational), by meditation (rational) and by contemplation (supra-rational) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 341-347). He also distinguishes two types of contemplation, identical to types 5 and 6 that he establishes in *Beniamin maior* and that we will present below.

In *Beniamin maior*, Richard proposes the following *definition of contemplation*, often criticized because of its too general and intellectual character and the lack of reference to grace or love, which must animate the Christian: *"contemplation is the free and penetrating gaze of the spirit arrived at the show of wisdom and remained suspended in admiration"* (Richard de Saint-Victor 2013, 97).

The Victorine distinguishes here *six genres of contemplation* (Richard de Saint-Victor 2013, 103-109), according to the nature of the touched objects and according to the faculties of knowledge involved. Genres 1 and 2 refer to the knowledge of sensible objects with the help of imagination; genres 3 and 4 aim at knowing intelligible realities using reason; and genres 5 and 6 denote knowledge of what is purely intelligible, through the exercise of intelligence (intellect). The last two genres are above reason and refer to things whose existence is admitted but impossible to prove. In the fifth kind, Grace makes accessible to the spirit truths concerning the divine nature and attributes of the divinity (the unitary God), and faith is thus strengthened. The sixth genre is not only above reason, but also contrary to it, since mysteries such as the unity of the Trinity and the Eucharist are revealed here. By distinguishing the six degrees of knowledge, from the experience of the created to the mystical union with the unique divine substance, Richard inspires the work of Saint Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.

Richard also establishes *three degrees or ways of progressing in the grace of contemplation* (Richard de Saint-Victor 2013, 505-509), depending on the role of the human spirit and divine Grace in the act of contemplation: the dilatation of the spirit (*dilatatio mentis*), the elevation of the spirit (*elevatio mentis* or *sublevatio*) and alienation of the spirit or ecstasy (*excessus mentis* or *alienatio*). The first degree is reached through meditation, so only through human effort, and the soul gets an overview of the created multiple. In the second way, human spiritual effort cooperates with Grace to acquire truths (still thematizable) from the upper limit of predicative reason, which were previously unknown to him. In the third way, the soul is led exclusively by divine Grace above the possibilities of human faculties (with the suppression of the limits of reason) and reaches the joy of contemplation. The soul is enflamed in this gradual ascent by the *love* of God, the *admiration* for the superhuman truths promised in revelation and the desire to attain them, and the *joy* of reaching ecstasy.

De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis is a spiritual opuscule that helps to understand Richard's spiritual theology and the two treatises, *Beniamin minor* and *Beniamin maior*, with which he presents correspondence. The four degrees of *charity (divine love),* a central concept of Richardian spirituality, established here (Richard de Saint-Victor 1955, 126-176), are: (1) *caritas vulnerans* (wounding love) through which the divine will, manifested itself in the level of sensitivity, causes the soul to crave the supersensible and to renounce the sensible world. This is the love of Christ, which violently pierces the human soul and reorients it towards the only desirable object; (2) *caritas ligans* (the love that binds), when the speculative element of contemplation prevails over the affective one. The soul passes into this stage when it becomes seized with an unceasing ardor, and is entirely subjugated and chained to the desired object; (3) *caritas languens* (love that languishes), the state in which the maximum force of divine love makes the soul forget the world and itself in full ecstatic union with God, is the death of the soul in God; (4) *caritas deficiens* (love that annihilates) is the highest degree of charity, which crowns Richard's spiritual teaching: after the ecstasy, the soul, transformed by the Holy Spirit, will annihilate itself, yield to the divine will and centre on dedication, and will be modelled as an *imitation of Christ*, for the glory of God and the salvation of man. It is the rebirth of the soul in Christ. The first degree is the encounter with the self and the inner divine, the second corresponds to the ascent of the soul to God, the third to the transformation through the divine fusion, and the fourth to the renunciation of self through Christian humility.

Between the degrees and genres of contemplation and the degrees of charity, the following correspondences can be highlighted: the 1st degree of charity corresponds to the 1st degree and genres 1 and 2 of contemplation (the sensitive level); the 2nd degree of charity causes the soul

to be in the 2nd degree of contemplation of gender 3 and 4 (rational level); 3rd degree charity corresponds to ecstasy, i.e. contemplation of degree 3 and gender 5 and 6 (the purely intelligible, contemplative level); and charity of the 4th degree, that is, *the love of the neighbour*, does not find any correspondent among the degrees and genres of contemplation.

If until the 12th century theology was a glossed reading of the text of Scripture, and from then on the use of dialectical reason would be integrated into philosophical theology, a fact that would catalyse the systematic constructions of the following century, Richard of Saint Victor is a typical representative of this inflection point, his work being divided into and linking these two main directions. Thus, the theory of knowledge illustrated by him glossed in *Beniamin Minor* is applied as a method of rational demonstration in the treatise *De Trinitate*. Therefore, the two works presented here provide a complete overview of the trinitarian model of human experience developed by Richard, its analogy with the relationship between the Trinity's persons and its application to the legitimate demonstration of the highest epistemological truths. If his contemporaries usually comment on Boethius's *Opuscula Sacra*, Richard surpasses them through the systematic and rational attempt in which he forges and applies his own epistemological model, which has influenced the modern critique of knowledge.

Trinitarian doctrine – the application of the model of knowledge previously illustrated

The gnosiological model illustrated allegorically in the mystical work is brilliantly applied in the treatise *De Trinitate*, the only dogmatic treatise of the Victorine, consisting of a *Prologue* and *six Books*, in which Richard wants to reach a deep understanding of the plurality of persons in the unity of the divine substance. On the level of human experience we are dealing also with a trinitarian epistemological (and wide psychological) model, in which the human person corresponds to the divine substance, and its faculties of knowledge correspond to the three divine persons.

We will deal with two consecutive demonstrations: the first for the unity of God as a simple (uncompounded) supreme substance, and the second for God as a Trinity (tripersonal manifestation of the same divine essence). The mentioned *model of knowledge-contemplation* gives the background of Richardian demonstrations and guarantees the attainment of the truth. The analogy between human and divine is used here, because the demonstration is valid within the framework of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the dignities of existence, of the creature's participation at the Creator, in which reason is the closest to God and of similar essence to him. Likewise, the transition from knowledge to contemplation would not be possible if

the demonstration were not governed by the Augustinian principle *credo ut intelligam*, which Anselm also appropriated when he considered the role of the reckless, the one who is guided only by reason (*acies mentis*) and only in this way he can doubt the existence of God (Baumgarten 2003, 88-103). Saint Augustine takes the Plotinian idea of the convertibility of divine principles into functions of the soul (Plotinus 1984, 45-49) and forges in the Christian world the model of the human mind as a divine image (Saint Augustine 1962, 208-209): the nature of the spirit mirrors the divine essence, and the faculties of the mind - memory, understanding, love - are the image of the trinitarian life. This correspondence between the divine persons and the faculties of the rational soul enjoyed a prodigious hermeneutical career and reached Richard through the Augustinian tradition.

Richard begins with the demonstration of the divine existence as a simple supreme substance, following Anselm in the *Monologion*: all the attributes of created things (e.g. goodness) must participate at the supreme attributes, and their existence implies a supreme being, to which they belong. The supreme being exists by itself, which means identity between essence and existence, proper only to God. He resumes the Anselmian ontological argument and concludes: "In conclusion, nothing greater, nothing better than God can be conceived by God himself, nor can it be comprehended by his intelligence" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 86). The supreme substance is the only one that has its being from itself and from eternity and is the origin of all other existences. Next comes the demonstration of the identity between substance and divine attributes, an approach also carried out by Augustine (Saint Augustine 1962, 208-209, 223-225, 508-509). If humans do not possess absolute attributes, but only participate at them, divinity and divine attributes coincide, these being undistributed, belonging only to God and identical to him: if people have power, wisdom, etc.,. God is the *power*, is the *wisdom*. The plenitude of attributes make God complete, universally perfect, *supremely good* and *supremely happy*. God is *ineffable* and can only be understood analogically.

In the second part of the treatise, Richard demonstrates the Trinitarian divinity. The necessity of the plurality of persons in the unity of the divine substance is demonstrated on the basis of the fullness of charity, of inter-subjective spiritual love. Thus, the supreme goodness of God claims charity, the sharing of supreme divine love reciprocally with a partner of the same nature. However, supreme charity claims a third consubstantial co-lover, witness and co-participant in the same perfect love. Perfect inter-subjective love must therefore be shared in a Trinitarian structure: "Then, in order to be authentic, charity-love needs a plurality of beings; equally, in order to be perfect, it requires a Trinity of persons" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 128). Inspired by Augustine, the idea of perfect charity represents for Richard a

trace of the Trinity in the human soul. All three divine persons have identical essence, existence and attributes, so their way of being different will have to be found.

The Victorine further establishes the concept of *person* and the possibility of distinguishing the divine persons according to the differences of provenance. In order to distinguish the divine persons, two criteria must be used: of existence (what a thing is) and of origin (from where it has its fact of being that thing). Richard ingeniously finds the word *existentia*, which accounts for both criteria as follows: *sistere* means *to be substantially something* and *existere* means *to be substantially from someone. Existence* therefore means *substance and origin*, the first *property to be distributed*, the second *not to be distributed* (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 151-152). It follows that the divine persons must be distinguished by origin. The definition of the person formulated by Boethius is further discussed: *"individual substance of a rational nature"* (Boethius 2004, 36). He says that this is too general and applies rather to human nature, and corrects it as follows: *"a divine person is an incommunicable existence of the divine nature"* (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 163). The incommunicable existence is given by the indivisible personal property - provenance, and the rational nature is given by the only one divine substance.

The Trinitarian life is demonstrated in what follows by establishing the incommunicable property of each person by origin or manifestation. The special attention to determining what is proper to each person is an approach of Abelard, unlike his predecessors Augustine and Boethius (Thom 2012, 64), and Richard takes it further. Thus, the incommunicable property of the first divine person consists in the fact of existing by itself. The second person comes directly from the first, and the third, which must have a direct connection with both, comes directly from both, so it comes from the first both mediated and unmediated. More persons are not possible (they are not necessary), because from the fourth onwards their provenance mode would be common with that of the third. Thus: the first person does not come from someone else, but has someone who comes from her, the second comes from someone else and has someone who comes from her, and the third person comes from someone else, but does not have someone who comes from her. As the divine being is identical with the attributes, the three ways of provenance are just as many ways of manifestation, of conveying the attributes. The three divine persons are coequals: "It is certainly unquestionable that according to total perfection there is no difference of love or worth in the Trinity" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 199).

At the end of the treatise, Richard is concerned with establishing the divine names as personal names, respectively finding proper names for the three divine persons, which are distinguished by origin or mode of

manifestation. As the creature is the mirror of the Creator, the divine persons will be named after the corresponding human kinship. Since unmediated provenance represents the highest kinship, that of filiation, the first two persons will be called *Father* and *Son*. The third person originates in a different way, and for it no kinship can be found, but a relationship of similarity. It will be called *Spirit* by analogy with the human spirit, that breath without which man does not live; similarly, the divine Spirit is a breath of love of the Father and the Son through which they communicate their supreme love to each other and can pour it out into human spirits. The Spirit is also called the *Gift* or the *Finger of God*, the Son is also called *Image* of the Father, *Word* of God, *Face of God's substance*. The Father is *Power*, the Son is *Wisdom*, and the Spirit is *Goodness*. The Father is *unborn*, the Son *born*, and the Spirit neither, but *proceeds* without begetting. There is one God as substance and three divine persons as modes of manifestation: "Without a doubt, in all of them, there is one and the same wisdom and consequently, one and the same substance" (Richard of Saint Victor 2011, 238).

The treatise *On the Trinity* shows that Richard joins the demonstrability of the Trinity tradition having as an instrument his proper trinitarian model of the functioning of knowledge. The dualism of the material and spiritual ontological levels can be comprehended through the trinity of the faculties of the human soul: senses, imagination and intellect. In this respect, Richard's theory of imagination acquires special significance because it is about defining the appropriate intermediary that connects the two extreme terms in the cognitive process. Even though he aims at intellectual contemplation, Richard insists a lot on the lower faculties, emphasizing the necessity of transforming vices into virtues and the correct use of the imagination as an intermediary between the soul and the world. Only in this way the gnosiological effort does not deviate from the truth.

Conclusions

Richard of Saint Victor, called by D. Poirel "the theologian of contemplation and the Trinity" (Poirel 2010, 6), is also *the philosopher of contemplation and the Trinity*, since both his mysticism and his trinitarian doctrine converge in a *knowledge-contemplation model* that establishes the rigors of cognitive and affective life that makes possible the work of human restoration through the ascent of the soul to God. Contemplation is only the last step of knowledge, so to be able to get there it is necessary to understand the human faculties of knowledge and how they operate. Until the religious (spiritual) experience is reached, we are dealing with an elaborate *gnosiology*.

Even if without the light of faith only the reckless can claim that reason would reach the truth, the fulfilment of the spiritual path is

conditioned by a very good understanding of the functioning of reason in relation to the other faculties of the soul, thus a knowledge of the possibilities and effectiveness of human experience. Through the distinction with which he knows to present clearly and thoroughly, using glosses to the Scriptures or reasonings, the whole and the elements of human experiences that produce knowledge, Richard proves to be a high-level thinker.

If the invisible divine realities are made visible to the intelligence through the mediation of the divine work of creation, the traces most suitable to mediate our knowledge of God are imprinted in his image, that is, in our rational soul. In order for the divine light to shine in the mirror of the soul, it must be cleaned, the soul must be purified.

Contemplation is at the top of the hierarchy of knowledge, after knowledge of things and self-knowledge. By considering the fact that the spirit that tries to reach the high knowledge of divine truths must first know itself, Richard adheres to the so-called *Christian Socratism*, initiated by St. Augustine and through which the self discovers itself as the image of divinity. Self-knowledge opens to the knowledge of otherness, up to radical otherness, divinity.

The sources that formed the Richardian thinking are diverse: the Scriptures, patristic writings, Latin classics, Augustine, Boethius, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, John Scotus Eriugena, Anselm, the School of Chartres, his Victorines colleagues (especially Hugo) and his brilliant contemporaries (in a special way Abélard) represent only a few influences visible. The taste for hierarchies, orders and trinitarian structures is a Neoplatonic infusion, and the same Neoplatonism is the environment in which medieval mysticism and mystical speculation develops. Greek patristics captures Plato through the thought of Philo of Alexandria and the Gnostic one, Clement of Alexandria and Origen develop the spirituality thus created which with Plotinus takes its classical form. It is transmitted in the Middle Ages with the addition of indirectly Aristotelianism through Porphyry, the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, Proclus, Boethius, Dionysius, Scotus Eriugena, Bernard of Clairvaux, Chartresians, Victorines, etc.

Richard continues Saint Anselm using the method of rational deduction initiated by the latter. The Victorine practices, like Anselm, a *revealed theology*. Even if his logical approach is a positive one, for the knowledge of the ineffable it must be followed by a negative understanding, and only after the synthesis of the positive with the negative can reason transcend into a higher register. This spiritual journey is an asceticism, and the final experience is a mystical one: not the divine falls under the concept, but the human soul is deified.

Saint Augustine is the one who inoculated Western thought with several paradigms that have changed the ages. Along with the concept

according to which the city of people is subordinate to the city of God and included in it, a concept that determined for a millennium the subordination of the state to the Church (Taubes 2009, 80), Augustine formulates, as I mentioned above, the analogy between human and divine: the cognitive faculties of the rational soul are the image of the perichoretic relationship between the persons of the Trinity. This thematization of the bishop of Hippo proved to be one whose validity transcends the spirit of the age, as it reveals an essential truth of the timeless human condition. Even secularized, it continues to preoccupy human thought, offering the possibility of the experience of a perfect knowledge in the indefinite limit between the actions of the faculties of knowledge, the same as the limit between the faculties and that something that transcends and encompasses them: Augustine discovers God in faith and in prayer, as being the one in the interiority of the self deeper than the self itself. This *depth of the soul* with function of transcendental origin of the human experience is an influential component of the Augustinian tradition, which, mediated by the Richardian approach, reaches the Eckhartian concept of *scintilla synderesis* (Libera 1998, 192-220). The inner divinity is one, but the manifestation through which we can experience it is in the trinitarian person of the Son. The Word is the divine spark from the soul and the guarantor of true knowledge; hence the capital importance of the understanding of the Trinity and the justification of the trinitarian analogies between human - divine, created - uncreated.

Thus, triadic models from the created world formulated by analogy with the activity of the Trinity's persons were built until the dawn of modernity. For instance, Kepler, the founder of the new astronomy, considers the world an image of God that symbolizes the Trinity (Koyré 1957, 58): the Sun is the Father, the sky is the Son, and the space between them is the Spirit. Although a promoter of modern science, he still has a model of the world inscribed in the tradition of Aristotelian scholasticism, a world created *ex nihilo* as a closed universe, which cannot be uniform, infinite or even indefinite, in which an infinite number of finite bodies are thoughtless and contradictory. For him, the phenomenal world is harmonious, regular, geometric, rational, in accordance with the image of the sky.

The Augustinian psychological model of the relationship between the faculties of the mind was the most fruitful and, metamorphosed and secularized, it is taken over by Kant, who establishes sensitivity, intellect and imagination as the faculties of knowledge. Formulated in secular frameworks or vice versa, such a model reveals the fact that Truth is ineffable, cannot be fixed by human faculties of knowledge, and a discursive knowledge can only approach it analogically; total experimentation is only possible through an exercise of the faculties beyond their partiality, in the limit between them, also the limit between them and their perfect, divine model, because simple, unitary and complete. Saint Anselm understands the

human condition very well when, in the *Proslogion*, he speaks of the intellectual experience of knowing God as that in which the thinking mind tries to comprehend him and ends up understanding and confessing that it itself is contained in him. This experience is that of passing from the concept of an object in general to that which can no longer be the object of any concept, because it is the comprehensive ("*continens*") par excellence (Anselm of Canterbury 1995, 112).

Developing both a logical and psychological model of the Trinity (divine and human), Richard realizes that the correct operation of the imagination is of prime importance in the functioning of the trinitarian cognitive sistem, so he makes long analyses of its process and establishes three modes for it: "the first is the basic operation of imagination (*imaginatio*), the second is imagination directed by reason (*imaginatio per rationem disposita*), and the third is imagination which is mixed with understanding (*imaginatio intelligentiae permixta*)" (Palmén 2014, 11). The basic mode in called Bilha-Imagination and operates as a bridge between visible and invisible world, between fleshly senses (*sensus carnis*) and the eye of the heart (*oculus cordis*) (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 103), so between sensitivity and conceptualizing reason, as long as without imagination, reason is unable to know anything. The objects with which imagination operate at this level are forms and similitudes, the material stored in memory can be provided to reason even in the absence of sensations and the operation can be both voluntary and involuntarily; therefore, the affective power of the human soul may change the content of imagination and so this can serve reason well or badly. The following two modes of imagination appears when reason (Rachel – *ratio*) tries to be fertile and desires wisdom (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 125). This is not yet possible without a moral reform, so the two sons of her slave Bilha are born, Dan and Naphtali, who represent the two forms of rational imagination (*imaginatio rationalis*) which fabricates new images on the basis of sensory material (Richard de Saint-Victor 1997, 133) and offer generalizations from individual images. This use of imagination, when reason tries to approach the rational principles of reality, is a necessary step to proceed toward invisible objects of contemplation. Until it can see through the pure understanding of contemplation, the soul needs to think with the help of imagination. If basic imagination is the instrument of the mind, rational imagination represents imagination's activity and its "most important task [...] is to construct images which are related to the future, [...] concerning the punishments or rewards" (Palmén 2014, 103). Dan-Imagination is the first kind of speculation and the lower form of rational imagination, closest to the operation of the senses, but directed by reason. The human mind works in this register when based on a known image of a visible thing, creates new visible images, so their ontological status remains the same. A possible

eternal punishment can be understood according to the model of a real punishment, so that all possible evils can be imagined starting from real images (and physical perceptions) of earthly torments. The terrifying promise of eternal punishment is part of the spiritual life, so Dan-Imagination is an important part of personal moral reform. Naphtali-Imagination is the second kind of speculation and the highest form of rational imagination where alongside discursive reason, the contemplative intellect (intellectual understanding) is also involved to guide the functioning of the imagination and to lead the soul to contemplate invisible objects through visible images. The human mind tries to imagine and to understand the absolute good and the eternal reward, but these are beyond the capacity of human imagination and divine enlightenment is needed to understand them. This third form of imagination makes the leap from experiencing visible things to knowing the invisible or spiritual ones, so leads to a higher ontological register.

Richard includes divine intervention in knowledge precisely to legitimize the possibility of ordering affects and transforming them into virtues, the epistemological and ontological advance to the post-discursive contemplation of truth. The analysis he makes of the imagination as a faculty of connection between the sensible and the supersensible prepares it for a critique as a faculty of judgment. Medium term of a trinitarian model, imagination in turn operates trinitarian. The Victorine understand imagination as a key element in knowledge and innovates an authentic model in which the techniques of comparisation (*comparatio*) and transference (*translatio*), as well as the differences between images (*species*) and similitudes (*similitudines*), validate analogical knowledge and therefore cognitive advance in both divine and human realities.

The model of knowledge-contemplation circulated in the work of Richard of Saint Victor announces the modern theory of knowledge, and Kant's critique best illustrates this: if the first *Critique* deals with the mode of operation of the faculties and the limits of predicative knowledge, i.e. that harmonization of affects and judgments necessary for the ascent to the summit of the soul, as presented by Richard, the third *Critique* speaks of the experience of the sublime, for Victorine the meeting of the soul with God at the summit.

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The Adventure of the Possible

(Emanuel Copilaș, ed., *Aventurile posibilului. Două secole de filosofie politică hegeliană*, Iași, Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2021)

Keywords: possible, Hegel, criticism, politics, ontology

The central thesis of the book, as articulated by the volume coordinator, revolves around a "founding paradox that celebrates what does not exist, apparently: the political philosophy of Hegel" (Copilas, 2021, p. 9). Structured into four sections, this volume serves as an invitation for a more pragmatic and holistic exploration of Hegel's philosophy and its legacy. It seeks to illuminate Hegel's works and their interconnections within the philosophical frameworks of Kant-Hegel-Marx and Hegel-Nietzsche-Popper, while also acknowledging the contributions of thinkers such as Herder, Benjamin, Collingwood, Rescher, and Hofweber. This approach is designed to engage a diverse audience, including those both familiar and unfamiliar with Hegelian thought. The emphasis is not merely on descriptive analysis; rather, many contributors have been motivated by a shared objective with the coordinator to identify how Hegel's legacy informs philosophical discourse, particularly in relation to contemporary political reasoning and the pressing realities of social and political life today.

The contributors to this volume present a range of interpretations and critical analyses of various concepts, notions, and perspectives that Hegel himself examined and critiqued. This philosophical journey commences with foundational ideas from Hegel's "Philosophy of Right", offering original interpretations that embed Hegel's views on the state, authority, and property within a contemporary ontology (Ionuț Tudor, Andrei Marga, Dragoș Popescu, Daniel Barbu). Notably, they highlight the theological dimensions of these concepts, which pave the way for discussions of the Hegel-Marx debates with epistemological implications in the latter part of the volume (Dan Alexandru Chita, Ana Bazac). This section captures the essence of the connections and tensions between Hegel's idealism and Marx's critique, both of whom perceive idealism and dialectical materialism as philosophies of

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history (Ana Bazac).

The examination logically continues with explorations of the reciprocal transformations between political philosophy and the philosophy of history. This section begins with a compelling reflection on the potential political dimensions of Hegel's philosophy, questioning his perceived associations with masonry through an analysis of his funeral speeches (Anton Adămuţ). This perspective offers valuable insights into the role of the intellectual in shaping knowledge during and beyond Hegel's era. The chapters in this section present Hegel's intuitive position within ongoing debates on conceptual idealism and the expressibility of reality, where Hofweber and others serve as critics of Kant's subjectivism (Florin Lobonţ). Additionally, there is a critical analysis of Hegel's equivalence between the real and the rational, casting doubt on potential errors in his logical framework (Ioan Biriş). Furthermore, one contributor scrutinizes the methodology of historiography, focusing on the logical consistency of philosophers' assertions and their role in constructing the historiography of philosophy, which Hegel would regard as the developmental history of concrete thought (Iovan Drehe).

In the final part of the book, the dialogue between Hegel and other philosophers, notably Herder, is examined, focusing on their respective interpretations of culture and its significance for education and human development, drawing on the ideas of Goethe (Ştefan Maftei). This analysis continues to illustrate how Hegel's comprehensive understanding of reality encompasses the realm of politics, particularly in terms of humanity's evolution—an aspect that signifies the centripetal forces emerging in postmodern philosophy.

This centripetal force is also reflected in the modernity depicted through the dialectical conflict explored in the hypothetical exchanges between Hegel and Walter Benjamin (Ioan Alexandru Tofan). The discourse highlights divergent understandings of recognition, creative violence, and civil politeness, which could disrupt the continuity of conflict. These nuanced analogies reveal the necessity for a critical exploration of Popper's critiques of Hegel, which he characterizes as defenses of absolutism and authoritarianism rooted in identity politics that he vehemently opposed (Adrian-Paul Iliescu). The analysis concludes that Popper's critique lacks rationality and accuracy, as it fails to recognize the applicability of Hegel's system of thought beyond its immediate context, marking a substantial oversight of Hegel's contributions to the balance between individualism and communitarianism, especially in comparison to John Stuart Mill's simpler ideas.

Continuing this critical examination, the final section introduces Nietzsche (Emanuel Copilaş), emphasizing his critique of Hegelian political ontology. This section centers on the concept of Evil as interpreted within

their distinct philosophical frameworks, encapsulating progress as a point of contention regarding the implications of scientific inquiry and openness to the world. The discussion concludes that while Nietzsche advocates for liberation from history, Hegel envisions liberation through history, with both representing ultimate forms of ontological existence in their respective philosophical realms. The contributor posits that Hegel may be perceived, through Nietzsche's lens, as a "masked hero" responsible for historical destruction by prioritizing state interests over truth, thus establishing an exclusionary relationship between their ideas.

Rich in themes and concepts that prompt reflection, this volume offers a re-examination of Hegel's philosophy (Ionuț Tudor) couched in accessible language for readers interested in diverse perspectives on the central arguments of Hegelian thought, which has inspired generations of thinkers and practitioners alike (Andrei Marga). For instance, the analysis of police institutions is approached from Adam Smith's pragmatic viewpoint in contrast with Michel Foucault's poststructuralist perspectives, framing Hegel's thoughts on this institution as a mere external order marked by unlimited limitations (Codrin Tăut).

Moreover, the volume presents a pertinent inquiry into the philosopher's status and the nature of the knowledge he generates and preserves, especially concerning the intersections of knowledge and action within masonic mythologies, and provides insightful reflections on the fluid relationship between Hegelian idealism and materialism.

The exploration of Hegelian philosophy, particularly in areas he may have only peripherally addressed yet inadvertently influenced, seeks—according to the authors—to reintroduce Hegel's ontology into the Romanian context of post-communist intellectual discourse, where concepts such as personhood and property remain contentious (Dragoș Popescu). This discourse is notably less developed compared to the philosophical frameworks of Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger (Emanuel Copilaș).

Consequently, rather than confining the reader to an exaltation of Hegel's significance within contemporary postmodern discourse, the volume invites a critical examination of regional and national politics through the lens of Hegelian thought. This approach aims to establish a new trajectory for the re-evaluation of Hegel and his philosophical contributions, acknowledging the transformations they have undergone, sometimes through excessive interpretation, within the context of evolving emancipatory projects inspired by his foundational ideas. These projects aspire not only to create a rational world but also to foster a more reasonable one (Ana Bazac).

In addition to repositioning Hegel within the landscape of philosophical inquiry in Romania, the book raises further questions that may yield partial yet thought-provoking responses regarding the extent to which two centuries of

Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy have facilitated the development of authentic political resistance relevant to their times, extending beyond the confines of philosophy itself .